

Fact Sheet:

Language Development in Children

In speech pathology, “language” describes how children understand what is said to them (receptive language) and how they share their thoughts, needs, and ideas with others (expressive language).

Typical language development

By the age of 1, your child should be able to:

- Understand simple commands, such as “no.”
- Recognise their own name and understand the names of familiar objects or people.
- Use sounds, gestures and say a few words (e.g. “dad”, “mumma”).
- Imitate different sounds and noises.

By the age of 2, your child should be able to:

- Follow simple 2-step instructions (e.g. ‘get your shoes and your backpack’).
- Understand and respond to simple wh-questions, such as ‘what’ and ‘where’.
- Have 50+ words that they use in their vocabulary and use 2-word combinations more consistently.

By the age of 3, your child should be able to:

- Follow more complex 2-step instructions (e.g. give me the ball and pick up the teddy).
- Understand and ask simple wh-questions, such as ‘what’, ‘where’ and ‘who’.

- Use 4-5 words in a sentence, with a variety of words for names, actions, locations, and descriptions.

By the age of 4, your child should be able to:

- Understand and respond to most wh-questions.
- Make longer sentences, using conjunctions such as ‘and’, ‘but’ and ‘because’.
- Ask many different questions.
- Use a variety of grammar concepts, including pronouns (e.g. he, she) and negation (e.g. don’t, can’t).

By the age of 5, your child should be able to:

- Follow 3-step instructions (e.g. put on your shoes, get your backpack, and line up outside).
- Understand instructions without stopping to listen.
- Use well-formed sentences that can be understood by most people.
- Tell simple, short stories, with a beginning, middle and end.

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How can a speech pathologist help?

- Assess your child's understanding and use of language.
- Provide strategies to support language development.
- Use play-based therapy to target specific language goals.
- Work with childcare or kindergarten educators to support language development in these settings.

What can families do at home?

- Increase language exposure by reading books, singing songs, and modelling language in play and everyday routines.
- Model a wide variety of words during play or everyday routines to support vocabulary.
- Acknowledge all communication attempts, not just spoken words.
- Wait to provide time for your child to respond, and to provide opportunity for communication.
- Accompany words with non-verbal communication to support understanding (e.g. gesture, pointing, showing).
- Avoid specific word requests (e.g. "say car"), as this places pressure on children.

- Avoid asking too many questions, as this places pressure on children. However, providing a choice of two can be beneficial (e.g. "do you want the banana or orange?")

When should I seek support?

Every child develops their language skills at different rates, however, the above are general patterns of children's language development. If your child is not meeting the above milestones, or you are concerned about your child's language development, you may need to seek help from a speech pathologist. If you are unsure, it is best to seek guidance from a speech pathologist, rather than to 'wait and see'.

For more information contact Benalla Health on (03) 5761 4500 to speak to a speech pathologist.