

Introduction

When it comes to speech and language, the first five years of life are filled with excitement. The communication skills your child develops during this time will have a major impact on your child's experiences throughout his or her life... at school, in relationships, at work, and in day to day life. And as a parent, there's a great deal you can do to help support your child's language development.

But how do you know if your child's communication skills are developing on track? The first step is to know what your child should be able to do at each stage... each of these accomplishments is called a milestone.

Think of every milestone as being built on building blocks. After each milestone is reached... the foundation is laid for the next one. The more blocks you have, the more solid your structure.

This program will demonstrate some of the communication milestones your child should be reaching at about this age. It will also show you how to give your child the Building Blocks needed to help him or her reach those milestones.

Milestones: 2 to 3 years

- Uses sentences with 5 to 8 words, like "Mommy, I want to go now." In this example, Cadence says "Baby, you spill your milk?"
- Clearly makes these sounds in words: p, b, m, h, n, w, t, d.
- Can say words with 2 or more syllables or beats, for example "a-pple", "rasp-ber-ry")
- Is able to use descriptive words, such as "small", "dirty", "wet" or "cold".
- Asks questions frequently, using "who", "what", and "where".
- Answers simple questions like "What is this?" or "Who made the mess?"
- Enjoys looking at books and talking about the pictures.
- Can sing parts of songs.

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- Understands the idea of size (like big or little) and the idea of quantity (such as a little, a lot, or more).
- Remembers and understands familiar stories.
- Shows affection for family or favourite playmates, and concern when someone is hurt or sad.

These are some of the milestones your toddler should be reaching by the age of 3, but it's important to remember that every child is unique and will reach milestones at his or her own pace.

However, some children have difficulty developing normal speech and language skills, and may need extra help from a specialist. It's important for these children to get help early to prevent more problems later on, and so that they can reach their fullest potential.

Be sure to speak with your healthcare provider if your child shows a lot of frustration when trying to talk... stutters for longer than a 3-month period... doesn't string two words together... cannot be understood by others... still drools... or if you have any other concerns about her development.

Now let's look at some important ways that you as a parent can help your child continue to build her language skills...

Building blocks: 2 to 3 years

You continue to play an important role in your child's growing ability to communicate. Between the ages of 2 and 3, your child is working on developing the language and grammar skills to start having real conversations with you. Here are some tips for how you can encourage this exciting phase of your child's development!

At this age, your child is learning to put together sentences with 3 or more words. Be sure to speak often with your child, using full sentences and good grammar. This way, you're modelling for her how to put words and sentences together in the proper way. Gradually, she'll begin to use more complex sentences and grammar herself!

Watch how Nev's dad talks to her, using full sentences...

It's normal for a toddler to mispronounce words, make grammar mistakes or to miss words in a sentence. The best way to help your child learn how to say things more clearly and correctly is not to tell her that she's wrong, but to repeat what she says, using the correct words and sounds. Try to put emphasis on the sound that was mispronounced or the word that was missed in the sentence. This way, you're gently showing her how to say things the right way, without making a big deal about her mistakes.

Find opportunities to practise counting things with your toddler. This will help her learn how to use plurals, by adding the letter "s" to the end of words when there's more than one thing. When she starts to use plurals herself, she'll probably only add the letter "s" to words... but eventually she'll begin to learn irregular plurals too, such as "feet", by listening to you use these sorts of plurals too. Watch how Cadence's dad counts with her...

When you offer your child the chance to choose what clothes to wear or what toys to play with, you're giving her a reason to communicate. She's also learning the power of communication – that by expressing her choice, she can influence what happens.

Singing fun songs that involve actions, taking turns, repetition and gestures can help develop your toddler's conversational skills. That's because taking turns is one of the most important skills needed to be able to have a conversation. Songs with lots of actions, gestures and repetition make it easy for children to know when to take a turn and to know what to do on their turn.

When reading with your child, ask her about the pictures in the book, and about what's happening. This will help pique her interest in the story and eventually she'll be able put ideas together to re-tell the story herself. Try not to overwhelm her with questions, though, or she may lose interest.

The best books for this age have short stories with a simple, predictable plot, fun words and repetition. Stories about the farm, zoo, or a visit to the dentist are often hits at this age.

Find opportunities, such as playing "I spy", to use words that describe colour, shape, size or number. This will help your child develop the vocabulary she needs to express herself in day to day activities, and reduce the number of communication breakdowns. Watch how Nev's dad encourages her to use descriptive words to talk about the images in the book they're looking at...

Help your child to tell stories by asking questions that guide her through her storytelling. To keep the story going, ask questions about "who", "what" and "where", as well as questions that offer her a choice in her answer. These questions show that you're interested in her story. Be sure to let your child take the lead and do most of the telling.

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Conclusion

In this program, we've reviewed some of the milestones your child should reach at about this age, and some simple ways that you can support his or her growing communication skills.

You're encouraged to return to this resource at each step of your child's development. And remember: if at any stage you have concerns about your child's speech and language development, don't hesitate to talk to your healthcare provider. By using the simple tips we've discussed in this program, and by getting help for any communication problems early, you can help pave the way for your child's future success!

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