

LITTLE MIGHTY

Speech & Language Milestones

Conception to Age 5 (Judgment-Free)

Evidence-informed. Judgment-free. Real.

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Why This Checklist?

Milestone charts can be stressful. One chart says your child "should" be doing X by age Y, and suddenly you're worried about being behind.

Here's the truth: milestone charts are ranges, not timelines. A wide range is normal. Your child's pace is their own pace.

That said, knowing what typically develops at each stage helps you understand what's happening and know when to ask for help.

This is a judgment-free guide. "Behind" or "normal" aren't useful words. What matters is your child's unique trajectory.

WHAT IT IS

- A reference guide showing what develops at each age
- A companion to understanding your child's unique path
- A tool to share with your paediatrician if you have questions
- Practical, evidence-informed, free of shame

WHAT IT ISN'T

- A report card or comparison tool
- A guarantee or prediction of your child's future
- A "normal vs. behind" chart (wide ranges are entirely normal)
- A replacement for professional evaluation by a paediatrician or speech-language pathologist

HOW TO USE IT

1. Find your child's current age range
2. Notice what's typical at this stage (remember: wide ranges are normal)
3. Trust your instincts about your child
4. Use the "What you might do" section for ideas to support your child's development

Important: Every child develops on their own timeline. Earlier, later, or different is all valid. This checklist is meant to help you understand development, not stress about it.

Conception to 3 Months

SPEECH & LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

- Makes comfort sounds (crying, grunting)
- Coos (soft vowel sounds like "ooo" or "aah")
- Turns toward sound
- Startles at loud noises
- Shows pleasure through sounds

WHAT YOU MIGHT DO

- Respond to every sound
- Narrate daily life ("I'm changing your nappy")
- Sing and play with your voice
- Talk during feeding and care routines

3 to 6 Months

SPEECH & LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

- Laughs and squeals
- Makes raspberries
- Strings together consonant-vowel sounds
- Responds to their name (sometimes)
- Watches your mouth when you speak
- Makes sounds to get attention

WHAT YOU MIGHT DO

- Repeat sounds your baby makes
- Sing songs and nursery rhymes
- Talk to baby frequently
- Read simple books
- Play sound games (silly voices)

6 to 9 Months

SPEECH & LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

- Babbling with repetition ("ba ba ba," "da da da")
- Understands "no"
- Responds to own name
- Uses sounds to communicate needs
- Might produce sounds for objects (not words, but intentional sounds)
- Pays attention to new sounds

WHAT YOU MIGHT DO

- Play babbling games (echo back their sounds)
- Name objects frequently
- Read books and point
- Play peek-a-boo and simple games
- Narrate routines and play

9 to 12 Months

SPEECH & LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

- Jargoning (longer, complex strings of sounds)
- Might say first true words (or might not - still normal)
- Understands simple instructions ("Where's shoe?")
- Points to objects
- Uses sounds and gestures to communicate
- Enjoys turn-taking games

WHAT YOU MIGHT DO

- Encourage pointing and gesturing
- Use simple, clear language
- Play simple games with sounds and movements
- Read every day
- Respond to attempts at communication (sounds, gestures, words)

12 to 18 Months

SPEECH & LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

- May say first real words (or may not yet - wide range is normal)
- Understands 20-50+ words
- Points to named objects
- Enjoys making animal sounds
- Uses gestures (waving, pointing)
- Follows simple one-step directions

WHAT YOU MIGHT DO

- Expand on words ("Yes! Doggy! Woof woof!")
- Name objects throughout the day
- Read the same books repeatedly
- Sing and play sound games
- Celebrate all attempts at communication

18 to 24 Months

SPEECH & LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

- May have 5-300 words (huge range!)
- Starting to combine two words (or about to)
- Understands much more than they say
- Asks "What's that?" by pointing
- Enjoys sounds and music
- Some intelligibility concerns may emerge

WHAT YOU MIGHT DO

- Expand on two-word attempts
- Keep reading and naming
- Play pretend games
- Encourage turn-taking in games
- Keep narrating daily life

2 to 3 Years

SPEECH & LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

- Using two-word combinations regularly
- Vocabulary growing (50-300+ words)
- Understanding 300-1,000 words
- Speech often hard to understand to strangers (but clearer to caregivers)
- Asking "Why?" frequently
- Enjoying storytelling and songs
- Sound substitutions normal (w for r, t for s, g for d)

WHAT YOU MIGHT DO

- Expand utterances ("Yes, baby sleeps. Baby is sleeping in crib.")
- Read frequently
- Play imaginative games
- Encourage conversation
- Model correct speech without correcting

3 to 4 Years

SPEECH & LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

- Speaking in 3-4 word sentences
- Vocabulary 500-1,500+ words
- Most people can understand child (75%+)
- Asking many "Why?" and "How?" questions
- Telling simple stories
- Still some sound substitutions (w for r, th for s, ch for sh)
- Speech becoming clearer month to month

WHAT YOU MIGHT DO

- Continue reading and discussing stories
- Answer (many) questions
- Play games that involve language
- Encourage imaginative play
- Read books with more complex plots

4 to 5 Years

SPEECH & LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

- Speaking in complete sentences
- Vocabulary 1,500-2,500+ words
- Speech largely intelligible to unfamiliar listeners
- Can tell stories with beginning, middle, end
- Understands more complex instructions
- Interested in letters and early reading
- Sound mastery improving (but some later sounds still developing)

WHAT YOU MIGHT DO

- Read more complex picture books
- Engage in conversations
- Play rhyming and sound games
- Practice early literacy activities (letter recognition, print awareness)
- Play board games
- Encourage dramatic play and storytelling

Important Notes

These are ranges. If your child is ahead or behind, it doesn't predict anything about their future.

Every child is different. Bilingual children may have different patterns. Shy children may speak less but understand perfectly. All normal.

Typical development isn't linear. Some months your child might seem to plateau; other months they leap ahead.

Trust your instincts. You know your child best. If something feels off, trust that feeling.

Milestones give you a picture of typical development, but your child's path is uniquely theirs. Trust your instincts, trust your child, and reach out if you have concerns.

IF YOU HAVE CONCERNS

If at any age you have questions or concerns about your child's speech, language, hearing, or development, please reach out to your paediatrician or ask for a referral to a speech-language pathologist. Early conversation with a professional - if needed - can provide peace of mind and support.

DISCLAIMER

This checklist is general developmental information for educational purposes, not medical advice. It is not a substitute for professional evaluation or advice from a paediatrician, speech-language pathologist, or developmental specialist. Every child develops on their own timeline. Variation in developmental timing is normal and does not predict future abilities or outcomes.