

Understanding and speaking "between the flags"

Children learn to communicate by interacting with carers, early childhood educators, and their peers.

A child's communication development is everyone's responsibility. Speech pathologists can support children (and those who care for them) to build communication, and make sure children are developing "between the flags".

We can work together to:

- find out which children are understanding and speaking "between the flags"
- create communication-supporting learning spaces
- help children with a range of communication needs.

Speech pathologists can also provide therapy to help children with:

- understanding and using pictures, symbols, signs, gestures, speech sounds, words and sentences
- taking turns and making eye contact
- building skills for later reading and spelling
- stuttering, voice and feeding difficulties.

Don't "wait and see"

Please speak to parents about their child's communication as soon as you have any concerns. Get advice from Speech Pathology Australia by phoning **1300 368 835**.

Work together with a speech pathologist in your area. You can contact speech pathologists:

- through local community health centres and not-for-profit organisations
- by calling or emailing private practices.

Try searching for speech pathology services online, or at www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au (click on 'Find a Speech Pathologist').

Language and cultural differences

Children from different backgrounds, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, may use words differently when learning English. This may not be a problem. Always encourage families to use the language(s) at home that they are comfortable speaking.

Regardless of whether English is a child's first language, ALL children need meaningful language experiences through stories, music, nursery rhymes, play and LOTS of repetition. If you're unsure about their progress, check with a speech pathologist.

Communication milestones

At 12 months children can usually...

- understanding**
- understand about 10 words
 - respond to their name
 - recognise greetings and gestures, such as 'hi' and 'bye-bye'
 - recognise a few familiar people and objects (e.g., mummy, blankie, teddy)
 - make eye contact.

- speaking**
- start to use sounds, gestures, and say a few words
 - continue to babble
 - copy different sounds and noises.

When you talk to me, **WAIT** for me to respond before you say more.



At 18 months children can usually...

- understanding**
- understand up to 50 words and some short phrases
 - follow simple instructions (e.g., 'throw the ball')
 - point to familiar objects when named
 - point to some pictures in familiar books.

- speaking**
- say 6 to 20 single words – some easier to understand than others, but becoming more consistent
 - copy lots of words and noises
 - name a few body parts
 - use objects in pretend play (e.g., hold toy phone to their ear and say 'hello?').

Get face-to-face with me when we communicate.



At 2 years children can usually...

- understanding**
- follow simple two part instructions (e.g., 'give me the ball and the car')
 - respond to simple wh-questions, such as 'what' and 'where'
 - point to several body parts and pictures in books when named
 - understand when an object is 'in' and 'on' something.

- speaking**
- say more than 50 single words
 - put two words together (e.g., 'bye teddy', 'no ball')
 - use their tone of voice to ask a question (e.g., 'teddy go?')
 - say 'no' when they do not want something
 - use most vowel sounds and a variety of consonants (m, n, p, b, k, g, h, w, t, d)
 - start to use 'mine' and 'my'.



At 3 years children can usually...

- understanding**
- follow more complex two part instructions (e.g., give me the teddy and throw the ball)
 - understand simple wh-questions, such as 'what', 'where' and 'who'
 - understand the concepts of 'same' and 'different'
 - sort items into groups when asked (e.g., toys vs food)
 - recognise some basic colours.

- speaking**
- say four to five words in a sentence
 - use a variety of words for names, actions, locations and descriptions
 - ask questions using 'what', 'where' and 'who'
 - talk about something in the past, but may use '-ed' a lot (e.g., 'he goed there')
 - have a conversation, but may not take turns or stay on topic.

Figure out what I want to say, and put it into words for me.



At 4 years children can usually...

- understanding**
- answer most questions about daily tasks
 - understand most wh-questions, including those about a story they have recently heard
 - understand some numbers
 - show an awareness that some words start or finish with the same sounds.

- speaking**
- use words, such as 'and', 'but' and 'because', to make longer sentences
 - describe recent events, such as morning routines
 - ask lots of questions
 - use personal pronouns (e.g., he/she, me/you) and negations (e.g., don't/can't)
 - count to five and name a few colours.

No need to always read the whole book. Talk about pictures that interest me.



At 5 years children can usually...

- understanding**
- follow three part instructions (e.g., put on your shoes, get your backpack and line up outside)
 - understand time related words (e.g., 'before', 'after', 'now' and 'later')
 - start thinking about the meaning of words when learning
 - understand instructions without stopping to listen
 - begin to recognise some letters, sounds and numbers.

- speaking**
- use well formed sentences to be understood by most people
 - take turns in increasingly longer conversations
 - tell simple, short stories with a beginning, middle and end
 - use past and future verbs correctly (e.g., 'went', 'will go')
 - use most speech sounds, but still may have difficulties with 's', 'r', 'l' and 'th'.

