

Early speech, language and communication development

Having established the activities that will create a good home learning environment, the next step in developing the behaviour change approach is to understand stages of early language and communication development and how parents can support their children at each stage.

Table 2⁴⁰ details the stages of speech, language and communication development from pre-birth to age 5 and the actions that support a child to achieve these milestones. It should be noted that development in young children is not linear, the age-range stated here is indicative of when a child should reach a milestone and we recognise that not all children develop typically.

Age	Milestone	Caregiving behaviours that support the milestone
From birth to 1 month	<p>Babies can recognise and turn their head towards their parent's voice.</p> <p>Makes pre-speech lip and tongue movements in response to talk⁴¹.</p> <p>Demonstrates a strong preference for human faces.</p>	<p>Spend time together face-to-face – see if baby can copy your tongue sticking out, blink your eyes, make lip sounds.</p> <p>Talk to your baby about anything and everything in a gentle, even voice when your baby is awake and try to make eye contact. Feeding and cleaning provide particularly good opportunities to start a 'conversation'.</p>
1 - 4 months	<p>Vocalises delightedly in response to chat or enjoyable play</p> <p>Recognises the difference between happy and sad faces and can copy simple facial movements.</p> <p>Responds to positive touch and can see, hear and smell.</p> <p>Can discern whether a person's gaze is towards/away from them or if people are behaving in a socially contingent way.</p>	<p>Talk to them in an animated, tuneful voice with lots of smiles, laughter and facial expressions.</p> <p>Respond to baby's movements and communication – copy the noises they make. Interpret their sounds and say what they are trying to tell you.</p> <p>Sing songs and rhymes with actions or lots of repetition.</p> <p>Play with your baby following predictable routines, but also contain an element of surprise. 'Body' or 'lap' games that include tickling or tactile stimulation, such as 'mousie creep' or 'koochy-koo' are especially liked by babies during the first few months of life.</p>

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4-6 months	<p>Babies can recognise own name.</p> <p>Expresses a range of emotions such as pleasure, fear and excitement through facial expressions, vocalisations and body language.</p> <p>Begins to engage in babbling that replicates the pitch and tone of adult speech.</p> <p>Shows clear like, dislike, acceptance and rejection of experiences⁴².</p> <p>Can track the gaze of others and share attention towards an object, such as a household item or a toy.</p>	<p>Continue to do the above, and chat with your baby (without distraction), look at them.</p> <p>Respond to infant babbling as if they are initiating a conversation.</p> <p>Describe your baby's emotions as you speak to them.</p> <p>Use daily activities as an opportunity to stimulate your baby's learning (e.g. go outside and smell a flower).</p>
6 months	<p>Babies will start to respond when others are chatting to them.</p> <p>Canonical/reduplicative babbling begins – babies tunefully using repetitive sounds in a sing-song tone.</p> <p>Babies start to understand routines, simple words and activities.</p> <p>Looks around the environment at people, objects and things that are happening.</p> <p>Responds when name is called⁴³.</p>	<p>Talk and sing while rocking them, walking with them and doing actions with them, e.g. 'round and round the garden', 'heads, shoulders, knees and toes'.</p> <p>Point out pictures in books and things of interest in the environment around you.</p> <p>Make lots of actions and gestures along with speech - use gestures and actions to help your child understand what you say, e.g. saying "bye bye" and waving.</p> <p>Respond when your baby tries to communicate. Take the time to have "conversations" with your baby with each of you taking turns.</p> <p>Use every day experiences such as shopping or going to the park as a chance to point things out and name things.</p> <p>Use books with textures that your baby can feel.</p>
9-12 months	<p>Gesturing and joint attention – baby looks to where another person points.</p>	<p>Gain your child's attention and talk to them about things as they happen gesturing to increase their understanding.</p>

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	<p>Object play – using every day objects, infants understand they can communicate and share information.</p> <p>Joins in with give-and-take games.</p> <p>Makes requests by pointing⁴⁴.</p> <p>Imitates playful vocalisations and actions, e.g. cough, smacking lips⁴⁵.</p> <p>Shows understanding of a few every day object words and words embedded in familiar routines, e.g. bedtime⁴⁶.</p> <p>Baby's first words.</p> <p>Understands “no” and “bye bye”⁴⁷.</p>	<p>Join in play activities with your child, let them lead the play using objects and toys they are interested in. Talk about the things they explore or look at. Use words and simple phrases and lots of repetition. Tell your child the name of things when they point to them.</p> <p>Play ‘people games’ like ‘Row, Row, Row Your Boat’ and get other family members to join in.</p> <p>Let baby turn the pages in books.</p>
1-2 years	<p>At around 18 months, children will know around 50 words and can say about 20.</p> <p>Children use sounds to represent meaning, e.g. “moo” for a cow.</p> <p>Starting to form sentences – combining two words, e.g. “doggy gone”⁴⁸.</p> <p>Can follow simple commands in context, e.g. “come here”, “give it to me”⁴⁹.</p> <p>Follows two-part instructions.</p>	<p>Building on the ideas above, chat and play with the things that interest your child. Ask them what they want to sing, play with or read. Play, sing and read together.</p> <p>Name objects and offer choices to build vocabulary. When you are playing, ask your child to hand you items you ask for, e.g. teddy, book, ball.</p> <p>Talk about what you are doing together – use words for actions as well as things. Use short simple sentences.</p> <p>Encourage use of and play with sounds.</p> <p>Introduce more songs and rhymes using gestures and objects to reinforce key words.</p> <p>Share picture books with your child and help them to name the pictures. Ask them to find familiar objects in books.</p>

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2-3 years	<p>Understanding of words and phrases grows quickly during this time. Children of this age understand between 200-500 words.</p> <p>Uses “no” or “not” in phrases.</p> <p>Refers to past/future events.</p> <p>Asks questions, e.g. “What’s that?”⁵⁰</p> <p>Can pick out objects by function, e.g. which one do we drink from?⁵¹</p> <p>Uses pronouns “I”, “me” and “you”.</p> <p>Uses descriptive concepts, e.g. big/little⁵².</p>	<p>Continue doing the activities above and build on children’s talk, e.g. Child: “Dog!”, adult: “Yes, a big dog”.</p> <p>Tap out the beat to songs and rhymes.</p> <p>When playing with your child, give a running commentary on what they are doing, using action words, describing words, position words and feelings as well as object words.</p> <p>Engage in conversations about feelings and important memories.</p> <p>Encourage the child to talk about the future and anticipate events.</p>
3-4 years	<p>Ability to form multi clause questions and narrative skills develop.</p> <p>Phonological awareness grows.</p> <p>Can listen to stories with increasing attention and recall. Joins in with repeated refrains and anticipates key events and phrases in rhymes and stories.</p> <p>Understands sentences of three to four information-carrying words (at 4 years)⁵³.</p> <p>Uses pronouns “he”, “she” and “they” (36-40 months)⁵⁴.</p> <p>Asks questions – “Why?” (36-42 months)⁵⁵.</p> <p>Uses language to pretend (42-48 months)⁵⁶.</p>	<p>Tell your child about your day. Ask your child questions about what happened in their day, helping them to use memory and to talk about things that happened in the past.</p> <p>Play make-believe games together or games which use opposites such as on or off, big or little.</p> <p>Reverse roles when you are playing together so your child gives you instructions, e.g. brush teddy’s hair, wash dolly’s feet.</p> <p>Play rhyming games – can your child come up with a word that rhymes with “cat”?</p>
4-5 years	<p>At 5 years, children are now able to understand sequencing, e.g. first we will eat breakfast and</p>	<p>Use open questions with lots of possible answers. “What are you going to play with today?”, “How do you think the character will solve the problem?”</p>

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	<p>then we will go to nursery. They understand past, present and future tense.</p> <p>Children will choose their own playmates.</p> <p>They are able to take turns in longer conversations and will not need to stop what they are doing to listen and understand what is being said to them.</p> <p>Most speech sounds are clear by 5⁵⁷.</p> <p>Enjoys jokes⁵⁸.</p> <p>Uses language to compare e.g. bigger⁵⁹.</p>	<p>Use new words in the context of play and activities.</p> <p>Ask decontextualized questions about past and future activities, “What did you do at the park last week?”, “What will you do on your field trip next week?” Tell your child about things you did in the past and will do in the future.</p> <p>Talk about sounds at the beginning of words and words that start with the same sound e.g. words beginning with ‘p’.</p> <p>Ask your child if they can give possible solutions to problems, e.g. their favourite hat is missing.</p>

Table 2: Stages of Early Speech, Language and Communication Development and Supporting Parental Actions

Source: EIF Early Intervention Framework with Input from National Literacy Trust and Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists

We have a good understanding of what makes a good HLE and the stages of speech, language and communication developmental of a child. This gives us a clear basis to set out the actions we want parents to take.