

## 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](http://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'.

