

# Does My Child Need Speech Therapy?

## Speech & Language Milestones

Children develop communication skills at their own pace as they learn to understand and use language to express needs, ideas, and experiences. The milestones below provide general guidance for speech, language, and social communication development.

Every child is unique, and these ranges are not strict expectations. If you have concerns about your child's communication development, a speech-language evaluation can help provide clarity and support. Early identification and intervention can make a meaningful difference.

## Language Development Milestones

### Early Communication Skills (12–18 Months)

Many children at this stage are beginning to build early understanding and communication:

- Respond to their name
- Understand familiar words and routines
- Follow simple directions (e.g., “come here”)
- Use gestures such as pointing, waving, and reaching
- Say a few meaningful words
- Enjoy social games, songs, and interaction

### Emerging Language Skills (18–24 Months)

Many children begin to experience rapid growth in expressive language:

- Use a growing vocabulary (often expanding quickly)
- Begin combining 2 words (e.g., “more juice,” “mommy go”)
- Follow simple one-step directions
- Identify familiar objects, pictures, and body parts
- Imitate words, sounds, and actions
- Engage more intentionally in social play

### Expanding Language Skills (2–3 Years)

Many children begin combining ideas into short phrases:

- Use short phrases and simple sentences
- Ask simple questions
- Follow two-step related directions
- Understand basic concepts (big/little, in/on, up/down)
- Engage in pretend and symbolic play
- Are understood most of the time by familiar listeners

### **Developing Conversation Skills (3–4 Years)**

Many children begin using language more effectively in conversation:

- Use longer and more complex sentences
- Participate in simple back-and-forth conversations
- Answer and ask a variety of questions
- Tell short stories about events or experiences
- Follow multi-step directions in familiar routines
- Are understood most of the time by unfamiliar listeners

### **Refining Language Skills (4–5 Years)**

Many children continue building strong communication and storytelling skills:

- Tell detailed stories with a clear beginning, middle, and end
- Engage in conversations with peers and adults
- Answer and ask “wh-” questions (who, what, where, when, why)
- Follow classroom-style directions and routines
- Use language for a variety of purposes (requesting, commenting, explaining, imagining)

### **When Should I Consider a Language Evaluation?**

It may be helpful to consult a speech-language pathologist if your child:

- Has difficulty understanding age-appropriate directions
- Struggles to express wants, needs, or ideas clearly
- Has limited vocabulary growth compared to peers
- Becomes frustrated when communicating
- Has difficulty engaging in age-appropriate play or social interactions
- Shows limited progress in communication development over time

## **Sources**

Information adapted from the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) Practice Portal and established developmental research in speech and language acquisition (including McLeod, Crowe, and related peer-reviewed studies).

## **Speech Sound Development & Articulation Milestones**

Children develop speech sounds gradually over time as they learn to coordinate the movements needed for clear speech. It is common for young children to produce speech sound errors as these skills are developing. Development varies from child to child, and the information below is intended as a general guideline.

### **Early Developing Sounds (Typically emerging in early speech)**

Many children begin using these sounds in early words:

/p, b, m, n, h, w, d/

Examples: pig, ball, mommy, nose, hat, water, dog

These sounds are often among the earliest developing speech sounds and are typically seen in early word combinations.

### **Developing Sounds (Emerging through the preschool years)**

Many children continue refining these sounds as speech becomes more precise:

/t, k, g, f, y/

Examples: tiger, cookie, go, fish, yucky

These sounds may still be developing during the preschool years and can appear inconsistently as coordination and clarity improve.

### **Later Developing Sounds (Typically developing through preschool to early school age)**

Many children continue working on these sounds as speech becomes more precise in connected speech:

/l, s, z, sh, ch, j/

Examples: lion, sun, zoo, shoe, chair, jump

These sounds are commonly still developing during the preschool years and may not be fully consistent until early school age.

### **Most Complex / Later Developing Sounds**

Some sounds take longer to develop and may continue refining into the early elementary years:

/r, vocalic r, th/

Examples: rabbit, car, bird, thumb, this

These sounds often require more precise tongue placement and coordination and may continue developing beyond age 5.

### **When Should I Consider a Speech Evaluation?**

It may be helpful to consult a speech-language pathologist if:

- Your child is frequently difficult for family members or unfamiliar listeners to understand
- Speech sound errors persist beyond expected developmental ranges
- Your child becomes frustrated when trying to communicate
- Teachers or caregivers express concerns about speech clarity
- Speech errors impact participation in school or social settings

### **Speech Intelligibility (General Guideline)**

A general guideline for how well a child's speech is understood:

- 1 year: ~25% understood
- 2 years: ~50% understood
- 3 years: ~75% understood
- 4 years: ~90–100% understood

These are general expectations and may vary based on the child, context, and familiarity of the listener.

### **Sources**

Information adapted from the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) Practice Portal and contemporary speech sound development research (including McLeod, Crowe, and other peer-reviewed developmental studies).