

Introduction

When it comes to speech and language, the first five years of life are filled with excitement. The communication skills your child develops during this time will have a major impact on your child's experiences throughout his or her life... at school, in relationships, at work, and in day to day life. And as a parent, there's a great deal you can do to help support your child's language development.

But how do you know if your child's communication skills are developing on track? The first step is to know what your child should be able to do at each stage... each of these accomplishments is called a milestone.

Think of every milestone as being built on building blocks. After each milestone is reached... the foundation is laid for the next one. The more blocks you have, the more solid your structure.

This program will demonstrate some of the communication milestones your child should be reaching at about this age. It will also show you how to give your child the Building Blocks needed to help him or her reach those milestones.

Milestones 3 to 4 years

With the help of Keegan and his mom, let's review some of the milestones your child should reach by his 4th birthday.

- Uses adult-type grammar. By this age, your child should be using full sentences that are similar to the type of sentences an adult would use.
- Asks and answers questions about "who", "what", "where", "why", "when" and "how"?
- Can clearly say these sounds in words: **k, y, f, g, s, z**.
- Is understood by strangers almost all of the time.
- Can follow a three-part command. For example, "Get your coat, put it on, and go outside." In this next clip, watch how Keegan responds to his mum's request for what she would like on her cake. "On my cake I would like raspberries, kiwi and pineapple".

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- Is able to create simple rhymes.
- Recognizes some letters and words. *Recognizes the word “stop” on the stop sign, identifies the letter “s” and the sound it makes.*
- Tells stories with a clear beginning, middle and end.

These are some of the milestones your child should be reaching by the age of 4, but it's important to remember that every child is unique and will reach milestones at his or her own pace.

However, some children have difficulty developing normal speech and language skills, and may need extra help from a specialist. It's important for these children to get help early to prevent more problems later on, and so that they can reach their fullest potential. Be sure to speak with your healthcare provider if your child is not understood by others 75% of the time... uses words in an immature or unusual way... repeats rather than responds... repeats words or syllables... stretches out sounds in words... gets stuck starting to say sounds or words... has a rough, raspy voice lasting longer than one month... or if you have any other concerns about his development.

Now let's look at some important ways that you as a parent can help your child continue to build his language skills...

Building blocks 3 to 4 years

You've probably noticed that your 3-year-old loves to ask questions and is curious about everything! This is great opportunity to share interesting conversations and promote your child's growing understanding of the world while helping build his language skills. Here are some important ways that you can support this stage of your child's development...

Your child is starting to put together more complex sentences at this age. Be sure to speak with your child often, using full sentences and good grammar. This way, you're modelling for him how to put words and sentences together in the proper way.

It's natural to want to use questions to keep the conversation going with a child. But too many questions can also end the conversation... especially if it seems like you're using them to test your child's knowledge. It's okay to ask some questions when you're taking turns talking, but be sure to also add comments... just as you would with an adult. One way to be sure you don't ask questions that will stop the conversation is to follow this rule: If you know the answer to the question, don't ask it.

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Children should be starting to use the past tense at this stage, to describe things that have already happened. This is an important skill for conversation and for storytelling. You can help your child learn this skill by emphasizing the parts of words that show they're in the past tense, such as the "-ed" at the end of the word. For example, "The dog jumped over the box!" Also emphasize irregular past tense verbs; for example "You drank all the juice! Watch how Keegan's mom places emphasis on the past tense...

Encourage your child to tell you about feelings and ideas. This is an important skill as it will help him to be able to express his own feelings and also to feel empathy for other people.

Children this age love books, so be sure to encourage your child's love of books by reading together often. Your child is now able to handle more complex stories with a beginning, a series of events in the middle and an ending. The best books for this age are those that appeal to your child's interests. Fairy tales and books with imaginary themes are often popular choices.

Use a lot of expression and animation in your voice while reading. Your child will love this because it makes reading fun, and it will help him connect and pay attention to the story. Point to printed words and the pictures that go with them. When you're reading together, point to printed words and the pictures that go with them as you read. This will help your child make the connection that printed words talk, and that they're another way of communicating. Watch as Keegan's mom points out the printed words "On" and "Off" to him, and how he makes the connection with what they each mean.

Give your child opportunities to regularly play with other children. This is important for helping him develop his social communication skills. By playing with other kids, he learns how to interact, listen, take turns and share with other children who aren't always as accommodating as adults. In other words, he's learning how to communicate and get along with his peers in the real world beyond his family. These are communication and social skills that he'll need at school and throughout his life!

Conclusion

In this program, we've reviewed some of the milestones your child should reach at about this age, and some simple ways that you can support his or her growing communication skills.

You're encouraged to return to this resource at each step of your child's development. And remember: if at any stage you have concerns about your child's speech and language development, don't hesitate to talk to your healthcare provider. By using the simple tips we've discussed in this program, and by getting help for any communication problems early, you can help pave the way for your child's future success!

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