

## 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 4 to 5 years***

Between the ages of 4 and 5 years, your child has probably become quite good at expressing himself and at telling longer stories. And although he's got lots of energy, he also has a longer attention span now than he did when he was younger.

With the help of Cowen and his mom, let's review some of the milestones your child should reach by his 5<sup>th</sup> birthday.

- Describes past, present and future events in detail.
- Loves to recite rhymes and jingles.
- Shows interest in written words and letters. For example, your child should be able to read own name and some words by the time he is 5. Watch here as Cowen shows us a word he can read.
- Understands directions involving "if... then". In this example, Cowen's mother explains what will happen if they read three more rhymes.

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- Pronounces most sounds and words clearly with few or no errors.
- Knows all the letters of the alphabet.
- Uses the correct pronouns, such as *I, me, you, he, him, she, her, they, them* and *we*.
- Uses the same grammar as the rest of the family.
- Identifies the sounds at the beginning of some words. For example, “Pop starts with the ‘puh’ sound.” Here, Cowen identifies some letters and their sounds in his book...

These are some of the milestones your child should be reaching by the age of 5, 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 appears shy and refuses to communicate or interact with others... does not use complete sentences... has difficulty following directions... or if you have any other concerns about her 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 4 to 5 years

At this age, your child may seem like a chatterbox, but he's very busy learning a tremendous amount about the world around him! He's full of questions, has a vivid imagination, and loves to engage in conversations and tell stories. These are all skills that will play an important role in your child's future success at school.

With the help of Cowen and his mom, let's look at some simple ways that you can help build your child's readiness for school...

Speak with your child often, using complete sentences. By doing this, you're helping build your child's understanding of appropriate grammar that he can use himself.

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Read together often, using plenty of expression and animation. This not only encourages your child's love of books, but also his imagination. The best books for this age are those with more detailed and complex stories with excellent language and imaginary or real themes. Fairy tales, fiction and non-fiction stories are all popular choices.

While reading a story with your child, pause before turning the page, and talk about "what will happen next". This encourages your child's ability to predict, anticipate, plan and imagine. It also gives him the opportunity to be creative and make up his own story.

After reading a story, talk about what happened in the beginning, middle and end of the story. This teaches your child about **sequencing**; in other words, it's teaching him that everything has a series of steps or events that need to take place in order for something else to happen. It also gives him a chance to practise using past, present and future tenses of verbs.

Teach your child about different ways to use and understand words. Use synonyms and opposites, and have fun playing around with long words, nonsense words, and rhymes. Children who can "play" with words in these ways become better readers.

Talk to your child about the print you see, in books, newspapers, instructions for toys, and on signs and menus. This shows your child that print is important and that we use it on a daily basis for all kinds of things.

Let your child experiment with writing. Start by helping him learn how to handle and use a pencil or pen. This is an important skill that he'll need in order to write. Once he's mastered scribbling, encourage him to try writing the letters of the alphabet, and then eventually words. Children this age usually start by writing their name and other family members' names.

### 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!