

Learning to Communicate: A Timeline for Typical Development

Parents should understand that the following is a guideline to steps in communication development. Individual children's development may vary.

By 3 months, a child usually can

- coo, cry, vocalize as communication, and parent caregiver can interpret child's cues
- respond to caregiver's speech
- react when seeing breast or bottle

By 6 months, a child usually can:

- babble
- smile and laugh as response
- turn toward source of normal sound

By 9 months, a child usually can:

- comprehend "no" and limited other words
- react when name is spoken

By age 1, a child usually can:

- speak actual words (may mispronounce)
- indicate needs and wants through sounds or gestures
- play games such as "peek-a-boo"

By age 2, a child usually can:

- sound most consonants and vowels, imitate many words accurately
- speak clearly at least half the time
- understand simple commands
- make eye contact when others speak
- understand about 300 words and speak in one-to two-word combinations
- answer "yes" or "no" correctly

By age 3, a child usually can:

- understand two-step commands
- understand about 900 words and speak about 200 words clearly
- use some contractions (don't, can't) and prepositions (in, on)
- use short, simple sentences
- ask and answer simple questions
- use some verb forms in past or future tense

By age 4, a child usually can:

- understand three-step commands
- understand up to 2,000 words
- use sentences of four to seven words
- use pronouns (you, me, I)
- tell stories, but may mix fact and fiction

By age 5, a child usually can:

- understand up to 2,800 words and use up to 2,000
- use complex sentences
- tell long stories accurately
- use most consonants accurately