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; 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