

Red Flags for Speech and Language

Speech and language development is one of the most critical school readiness skills. **Early identification is key: don't wait!**

If a child is missing one or more of these expected age outcomes, consider this a red flag.



By 6 months

- Turns eyes or head toward a sound
- Watches your face when you speak
- Smiles & laughs in response to your smiles & laughs
- Has different cries for different needs
- Makes sounds &/or moves body in response to you

By 9 months

- Responds to his/her name
- Babbles e.g., bababa, dadada
- Plays social games with you e.g., peek-a-boo



By 18 months

- Identifies several body parts when asked
- Understands the concepts of "in /out , off/on"
- Points to pictures using one finger
- Says about 20 words consistently
- Uses at least 4 consonant sounds e.g., p, b, m, n, d, g, w, h
- Pretends to feed a doll/teddy or pretends a bowl is a hat

By 2 years

- Follows 2 step directions e.g., "go find your teddy & show it to grandma"
- Uses at least 100 words including action words e.g., fall, eat, go
- Combines at least 2 words e.g., daddy sleep
- Enjoys being with other children
- Puts 2 pretend play actions together e.g., stirring food and feeding a doll



By 4 years

- Follows 3 part directions e.g., "get some paper, draw a picture, & give it to mommy"
- Uses sentences with adult-type grammar e.g., "he's going to the park now"
- Tells a story
- Speech is understood by strangers most of the time
- Can act out different roles with their friends e.g., going to a restaurant



By 12 months

- Follows simple 1 step directions e.g., "sit down"
- Gives familiar items on verbal request
- Points to things he/she wants
- Uses gestures e.g., waving "bye-bye"
- Brings toys to show you
- Looks across the room to something you point to
- Gets your attention using sounds, and gestures while looking at your eyes



By 3 years

- Understands who, what, where, & why questions
- Can create long sentences combining at least 5 words
- Uses some adult grammar e.g., cookies, mommy's coat, I jumped
- Can have a short conversation
- Speech is understood at least 75% of the time
- Pretends with friends using many actions e.g., having a tea party



If a child is experiencing any of the following, consider this a red flag:

- Limited interest in toys &/or plays with them in an unusual way
- Has lost words he/she used to say
- Stuttering
- Ongoing hoarse voice
- Problems with chewing or swallowing

Where there are concerns, the parent should contact: the Preschool Speech and Language Program **(705) 739-5696 or 1-800-675-1979**

Adapted from Ontario Ministry of Children & Youth Services, 2007