

## Speech

Children learn speech sounds by listening to the sounds they hear in the languages around them. Children start by using babbled sounds and progress to using sounds in words and sentences. Children develop the ability to use different speech sounds at different ages and they will not be able to say all sounds straight away.

It is very common for children under the age of 6 to experience times of repeating words or hesitating when they speak and this is known as [stammering](#), stuttering or dysfluency. If this is something which persists in your child's speech for more than 4 weeks, please contact the [SLT helpline](#) to discuss this.

Age	Minimum Expectations for Child
2	Developing use of 'p' 'b' 't' 'd' 'n' 'm' 'w'. Speech can be difficult to understand as only a few sounds used. Often missing off the end of words.
3-4 years	Lots more sounds being used including 's' and 'f'. Understood by more people e.g. nursery, extended family. Might be some dysfluency at times.
4-5 years	Should be understood by most people most of the time. By age 5yrs, 'k' and 'g' sounds should be used. Still learning to use blends e.g. 'sp' 'bl' 'cr', and some more difficult sounds 'ch' 'j' 'l'.
6 years	'th' and 'r' still might not be used. Can make self understood easily.
9 years	All sounds in place except 'th'. All speech sounds now in place .

## Here are 5 'top tips' to help

**Note** Children learn best from real experiences and interaction with others. Make sure you give your child lots of chances to play and talk without [screens](#) switched on e.g. TV, phones, and tablets

<b>1</b>	Listen to what your child says rather than how they are saying the sounds.
<b>2</b>	Let your child hear clear adult models of words with no pressure to copy these.
<b>3</b>	When you find out what your child was trying to say, repeating the word or sentence lets them hear the correct model. This also helps them see that you have listened and understood what they were trying to say.
<b>4</b>	If you have only understood part of what your child says, repeat that part back to them showing that you have understood part of their message. This may encourage them to have another go at the bit you missed the first time.
<b>5</b>	Try to figure out what is meant by asking your child to show you, or ask questions (where is it, what does it do?). If you cannot figure out your child's message find a way to end the conversation helpfully e.g. "maybe we'll work it out later".

## Using Words and Sentences

Children start to use babbled sounds before moving on to using single words and then joining words together into short phrases and then sentences.

Being able to use words and sentences lets children express their wants and needs and to share their thoughts and feelings.

Age	Minimum Expectations for Child
2	Uses 10-20 single words. Uses lots of jargon/nonsense speech.
2 ½	Uses 50 words, including action words e.g. run, jump. Uses 2 words together, e.g. 'daddy car'.
3-4 years	Uses 3-4 word sentences. Uses 'small' words like 'the' and 'is'.
4-5 years	Can hold a simple conversation. Using 4000-5000 words. Joins sentences with 'and' and 'because'.
6 years	Uses long sentences with correct grammar. Retells a story or event.
9 years	Expresses ideas clearly and logically. Rapidly learning and using lots of new word.
11 years	Can use sarcasm and idiomatic language e.g. 'the teacher exploded' to mean 'the teacher was angry'. Can initiate and share ideas and opinions clearly.

## Here are 5 'top tips' to help – First words

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1	The best way for your child to develop language is through play – make time each day to play with your child.
2	When playing with your child, keep your own language simple. This will be much easier for them to copy. Name the items your child is looking at or interested in e.g. when looking at a plane in the sky – say “plane!” or “look, plane!”
3	Offer choices and wait for your child to respond e.g. “want water or milk?” Accept all responses (such as pointing and gesture) and repeat the word for your child to listen to.
4	Try not to ask too many questions as this does not help your child to learn more words. It is more helpful if you make comments and name things for your child e.g. instead of saying “What’s that?” you might say “Look, there’s a <b>duck</b> ”.
5	Keep sentences short – ideally 1 or 2 words. It is easier for your child to learn a new word when the word is not in a sentence.

## Here are 5 top tips to help – Putting words together

1	Model lots of language for your child to hear. Talk about things that your child is seeing, hearing and doing.
2	Once your child is using lots of naming words (e.g. car, ball, tree), you can help them to use more action words e.g. say what the child is doing with toys – teddy sleeping, dolly crying. This helps your child start to make their first sentences.
3	Repeat any words your child says and add a word or two of your own so they can hear how to make the sentence longer.
4	Repeat what your child says in the correct way so they hear how to use words in sentences e.g. “daddy car” > “Daddy driving the car”.
5	Use the same phrases over and over again with everyday situations e.g. “Hello teddy”, “More juice”, “Open the door”.

## Understanding words and sentences

The ability to understand language develops over time and children generally understand more words than they can say.

Children start by understanding single words and looking for clues from the situation. They then develop their ability to understand two and three word phrases and simple instructions.

The understanding of some questions can be harder and takes time to develop.

Age	Minimum Expectations for Child
2	Understands simple naming words, e.g. body parts.
2 ½	Understands early action words, e.g. cry, jump, want.
3-4 years	Understands simple instructions. Understands 'who' 'where' 'what' questions.
4-5 years	Understands conversations. Understands 'why' questions.
6 years	Understands 'how' questions. Understands time, e.g. yesterday, tomorrow, next week.
9 years	Understands hidden meanings, realising the meaning can be different from the words actually spoken e.g. it's raining cats and dogs.
11 years	Understands increasingly complex vocabulary, e.g. science words.

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1	Get down to your child's level and talk to them face to face.
2	Help your child to understand words by showing them what you are talking about e.g. point to items, use gestures and/or show your child objects/pictures to help them understand.
3	Keep your words and sentences really simple by using single words or shorter sentences and remember to break down longer instructions into smaller parts e.g. instead of: "would you like to build a big castle with these red bricks?" try saying: "build castle?"
4	Remember that questions can be difficult for your child to understand. It is easier for your child to answer a yes/no question or make a choice. You can also try using more comments instead of questions e.g. instead of "What's that?" you could say "Look! There's a bus".
5	Talk about what is happening in the here and now. Look at what your child is focussed on and talk about that. This means that your child is more likely to understand you and join in. Use the same words in routines as this will help your child work out what you are talking about.

## Attention & Listening

Attention and listening skills are very important for children to be able to make sense of words they hear and to respond to others.

Children have to learn to pay attention first to people, then to objects, then to people **and** objects. Children need to develop good attention and listening so they can learn new skills including how to use language successfully.

Children may **hear** what you say but not really **listen** to it – they need to think about what has been said, and with practice, begin to make sense of it.

**Note** Listening skills are different from being able to **hear** sounds. If you have any concerns about your child's hearing, please speak to your Health Visitor or GP.

Age	Minimum Expectations for Child
2	Responds to environmental noise and familiar voices.
2 ½	Enjoys listening to a short story. Still needs help to shift attention.
3-4 years	Concentrates on activity of own choice for 10-15 minutes.
4-5 years	Listens to instructions given to a whole group. Attention span may still be short.
6 years	Listens and respond to a series of instructions.
9 years	Concentrates and focuses on a task even with distractions.

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1	Help your child listen more by reducing background noise made by people talking, TV, radio etc as much as possible. This ensures you have their full attention.
2	Use your child's name to get their attention.
3	Encourage your child to stop what they are doing before giving instructions and keep your instructions short and simple.
4	Have fun listening together. Try going on a 'listening walk' and see how many sounds your child can hear e.g. dog barking, puddles splashing etc.
5	Singing simple action songs are a great way of getting your child's attention e.g. row the boat, the wheels on the bus.

## Social Interaction & Play

**Social Interaction** is key to the development of all speech, language and communication skills. By interacting with others, children learn that good conversations involve more than one person and can be fun!

Good interaction skills involve things like eye contact, taking turns, sharing enjoyment and having an interest in what someone else is saying or doing.

**Play** allows children to learn about the world around them. Children need to have a variety of experiences to help them explore their world and practise skills which are important for learning, such as sharing and taking turns.

Age	Minimum Expectations for Child
2	Interested in people and responds to them using facial expressions such as smiling or laughing. Will use pointing and will bring objects to show others. Enjoys social games such as peekaboo. Acts out simple play routines, e.g. 'feeding' toys, putting dolly to bed.
2 ½	Showing interest in other children. Sharing own enjoyment with others. Joining sequences together e.g. Making the tea and washing the dishes.
3-4 years	Likes to play with other children. Enjoys pretend and imaginative play.
4-5 years	Beginning to learn about how to communicate in different ways in different places e.g. speaking differently with friends and with teachers. Enjoys pretending to be another person and will act 'in character'.
6 years	Enjoys working as part of a group. Enjoys making friends and can understand more about body language e.g. understanding how someone feels from tone of voice or facial expression. Likes organising games with other children.
9 years	Empathises with others. Beginning to say what the listener wants to hear rather than the 'truth' e.g. being polite about unwanted presents. Knows how to make and maintain friendships.
11 years	Aware of and responds to other people's views. Aware of and influenced by peer pressure.

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1	Remember, communication is much more than just words. Look for your child using pointing, facial expression, crying, making sounds, looking and reaching to tell you what they want. Respond to all your child's attempts to communicate with you.
2	Try to have only a few toys and books out at one time for you and your child to enjoy together.
3	Look carefully at what your child is interested in doing with their toys and try to copy them and join in.
4	Play lots of turn- taking games which encourage eye-contact, sharing and waiting. Make sure you choose games that your child needs you to help with e.g. blowing bubbles, rolling balls, wind-up toys.
5	When you know what your child wants, help them communicate more by waiting a moment or two before you respond. You may be surprised at what they can do/show you. e.g. offer a little then wait – instead of giving your child several grapes/snacks, give them only one so they need to ask/show you that they want more.