

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.

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

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.

