



Language development in children: 0-8 years

Language development in children is amazing, and it's a development that many parents really look forward to. The secret to helping your child learn language is very simple: talk together lots and listen lots.

Language development in children: what you need to know

Language development is a critical part of your child's overall development.

It supports your child's ability to communicate, and express and understand feelings. It also supports thinking and problem-solving, and developing and maintaining relationships. Learning to understand, use and enjoy language is the critical first step in literacy, and the basis for learning to read and write.



In their first 12 months, babies develop many of the foundations that underpin speech and language development. And they keep developing language skills at an amazing rate in the first three years of life.

How to encourage your child's early language development

The best way to encourage your child's speech and language development is to **do lots of talking together** about things that interest your child. It's all about following your child's lead as he shows you what he's interested in by waving, pointing, babbling or using words.

Talking with your child

Talk to your baby and treat her as a talker, beginning in her first year. When you finish talking, give her a turn and wait for her to respond – she will! And when your child starts babbling, copy your baby and babble back. You'll probably find that she babbles back to you again. This keeps the talking going and is great fun.

Responding to your child

As your baby grows up and starts to use gestures, you can respond to his attempts to communicate. For example, if your child shakes his head, respond as if he's saying 'No'. If he points to a toy, respond as if your child is saying, 'Can I have that?' or 'I like that'.

When your child starts using words, you can **repeat and build on what your child says**. For example, if she says, 'Apple,' you can say, 'You want a red apple?'

When you tune in and respond to your child, it encourages him to communicate. You'll be amazed at how much he has to say, even before his words develop.

Everyday talking

Talking about what's happening in your daily life together is a great way to increase the number of words your child hears. You can talk about things that make sense to her, like what she's seeing or doing – the key is to use lots of different words and in different contexts. For example, you can talk to your child about an orange tree and about cutting up an orange for lunch. This helps your child learn the meaning and function of words in her world.

It doesn't matter if your child doesn't understand, because his understanding will grow as he develops.

From the time your child starts telling stories, encourage her to **talk about things in the past and in the future**. For example, at the end of the day, you could talk about plans for the next day, by making a shopping list together or deciding what to take on a visit to grandma. Or when you come home from an outing together, you could talk about it.

Reading with your baby

Read and share lots of books (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/play-learning/literacy-reading-stories/reading-storytelling>) with your child, and read more complex books as he grows. Reading lets your child hear words in different contexts, which helps him learn the meaning and function of words.

Linking what's in the book to what's happening in your child's life is a good way to get your child talking. You can also encourage talking by chatting about interesting pictures in the books you read with your child.

When you read aloud with your child, you can point to words as you say them. This shows your child the link between written and spoken words, and helps her learn that words are distinct parts of language. These are important concepts for [developing literacy](https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/play-learning/literacy-reading-stories/developing-literacy) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/play-learning/literacy-reading-stories/developing-literacy>).

Your local library is a great source of new books.



If your family speaks two languages, you can encourage your child's language development in both languages – for example, English and Spanish. [Bilingual children](https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/connecting-communicating/bilingualism-multilingualism/raising-bilingual-children-tips) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/connecting-communicating/bilingualism-multilingualism/raising-bilingual-children-tips>) can achieve language development milestones at a similar rate to children who speak one language.

Language development: the first eight years

Here are just a few of the important things your child might achieve in language development between three months and eight years.

3-12 months

In this period, your baby will most likely coo and laugh, play with sounds and begin to communicate with gestures like waving. Babbling is an important developmental stage during the first year.

Babbling is often followed by the 'jargon phase' where your child might sound like he's talking or having a conversation. At this stage, though, this 'speech' doesn't mean anything. First words often start by around 12 months.

You might hear babbling, jargon and new words together as your child gets closer to saying her first words.

If your baby isn't babbling and isn't using gestures by 12 months, talk to your GP or child and family health nurse or another health professional.

Find out more about [language development from 3-12 months](https://raisingchildren.net.au/babies/development/language-development/language-3-12-months) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/babies/development/language-development/language-3-12-months>).

12-18 months

At this age, children often say their first words with meaning. For example, when your child says 'Dada', he's calling for his dad. In the next few months, your baby will keep adding more words to his vocabulary. He can understand more than he can say and can follow simple instructions too. For example, your baby can understand you when you say 'No' – although he won't always obey!

18 months to 2 years

In her second year, your toddler's vocabulary has grown and she'll start to put two words together into short 'sentences'. She'll understand much of what you say to her, and you can understand what she says to you (most of the time!).

Language development varies hugely, but if your baby doesn't have some words by around 18 months, talk to your GP or child and family health nurse or another health professional.

Find out more about [language development from 1-2 years](https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/development/language-development/language-1-2-years) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/development/language-development/language-1-2-years>).

2-3 years

Your child can speak in longer, more complex sentences now, and is getting better at saying words correctly. He might play and talk at the same time. Strangers can probably understand most of what he says by the time he's three.

Find out more about [language development from 2-3 years](https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/development/language-development/language-2-3-years) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/development/language-development/language-2-3-years>).

3-5 years

You can expect longer, more abstract and more complex conversations now. For example, your child might say things like, 'Will I grow into a watermelon because I swallowed the watermelon seed?'

Your child will probably also want to talk about a wide range of topics, and her vocabulary will keep growing. She might show that she understands the basic rules of grammar, as she experiments with more complex sentences that have words like 'because', 'if', 'so' or 'when'. And you can look forward to some entertaining stories too.

Find out more about [language development from 3-4 years](https://raisingchildren.net.au/preschoolers/development/language-development/language-3-4-years) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/preschoolers/development/language-development/language-3-4-years>) and [language development from 4-5 years](https://raisingchildren.net.au/preschoolers/development/language-development/language-4-5-years) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/preschoolers/development/language-development/language-4-5-years>).

5-8 years

During the early school years, your child will learn more words and start to understand how the sounds within language work together. He'll also become a better storyteller, as he learns to put words together in different ways and build different types of sentences. These skills also let him share ideas and opinions. By eight years, he'll be able to have adult-like conversations.

Find out more about [language development from 5-8 years](https://raisingchildren.net.au/school-age/development/language-development/language-5-8-years) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/school-age/development/language-development/language-5-8-years>).



Children grow and develop at different rates, and there's a big range of 'normal' in development. But you know your child best. If you have any concerns about your child's language development, ask your [child and family health nurse](https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/a-z-health-reference/child-family-health-nurse) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/a-z-health-reference/child-family-health-nurse>), [GP](https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/a-z-health-reference/general-practitioner) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/a-z-health-reference/general-practitioner>), or [paediatrician](https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/a-z-health-) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/a-z-health->

[reference/paediatrician](#)), or see a [speech pathologist](#) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/a-z-health-reference/speech-pathologist>).

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