



When do babies start talking? A year-to-year guide

Listen

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ARTICLE

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Children's speech milestones can be observed by their babbles and imitations. Parents can help encourage their children by talking to them and using short and simple words, sounds, and sentences.

Talk and listen to your child to encourage them to talk more.

For any parent, nothing beats the adorable-ness of the sound of their baby's gurgles. But these pale next to the little one's tentative steps into speech: the babbles forming into words sound like nothing less than a miracle.

There's a long distance yet from baby gurgling to full on speech. What happens in between? How does language develop from babbling to talking? If "when will my baby talk?" is a constant question in your head, read this guide to your baby's speech milestones in the first three years.

Year One: Baby Babblers

For the first three months of life, all babies do are cry and coo. They learn to make more sounds when they're between four and six months old, such as gurgle, laugh, squeal and grunt. Then, during the next three months, they babble and start imitating tones and sounds. Babbling - when babies say things like 'ga ga ga' or 'ma ma ma' - is an important stage in a child's speech development.¹

After this comes what is known as the 'jargon phase', where your baby will make an unintelligible series of sounds in a conversation-like tone. By the time your baby is a year old, they would have said their first words.²

What you can do: Parents should talk to children about whatever they are doing, as well as make noises to them from day one, as this encourages babies to start talking. You should also sing nursery rhymes to them and play interactive games such as peek-a-boo.³

If your baby isn't trying to communicate with you through words, sounds or gestures by their first birthday, you should speak to a doctor.

Year Two: Starting on Sentences

By the time your baby is 18 months old, they'll be able to refer to themselves by name. And, a few months after that, they'll understand the usage of 'I' when referring to themselves.

As your baby reaches two years old, they'll put two words together in short sentences, such as 'mummy eat' or 'car go'. They'll be able to understand most of what you're saying to them. And, most importantly, you'll understand what they're saying most of the time too.⁴

Children between the ages of 18 months and two years use around 50 words.⁵ It's normal to pronounce words differently than adults; this is part of the learning process. Don't criticise them; instead, repeat the word in its correct form so that they'll pick it up from you.

What you can do: Talk and listen to your child to encourage them to talk more. Tell them stories, sing songs, come up with rhymes - the more words they hear, the more they'll learn. Even telling them about what you did during the day will help your toddler's language development.⁶

Year Three: Expanding Vocabulary

Your child's pronunciation gets better – although not perfect yet – during this year and they'll be able to speak in sentences with three or more words. Their vocabulary has expanded and they can identify almost all common objects (eg. car, tree, dog).

Sentences become more structured and they'll be able to use past tense and plurals too. They'll also know how to use pronouns such as I, me, he and she. By the time they're three, even strangers will be able to understand most of what they're saying.

They're learning new words all the time and will understand more words than they can use. They'll form questions using 'who', 'what' and 'where' – and answer such questions when asked too. And they'll understand the concept of 'mine' and 'yours'.⁷

What you can do: It's possible to have conversations with them and they can tell you about their day – in short, incomplete sentences. Help them to learn by letting them lead the conversation, occasionally offering words or asking questions for them to expand on their thoughts. Plus, they'll talk while playing too, such as giving their toys voices.⁸

It's also important to enhance your child's diet with food containing nutrients that aid their speech and language development. For example, you can choose a formula milk that contains sphingomyelin, a nutrient that helps enhance brain connections through a process known as myelination. This nutritional edge may help your children perform mental operations faster, positively affecting their language skills⁹, memory and intelligence.¹⁰

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