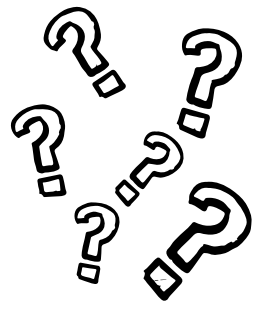


Speech & Language Development

Created by the Speech-Language Pathology Team at the School District of Onalaska



When Should I Worry If My Child is Behind?

Developing speech and language is a complex task. It does not always follow a linear pathway for each child. If your child is under five years old and you're worried about their development, scan the QR code or visit the website to the right to check if your child meets most of the milestones for their given age range.



<https://www.asha.org/public/developmental-milestones/communication-milestones/>



A Quick Look at Milestones...

SPEECH AND LANGUAGE MILESTONES 2-3 YEARS

SPEECH:

- By 3 years-old, can produce the following sounds: p, b, m, d, n, h, w, t, k, g, f, y, ng
- Speech is becoming clearer, but may not be understandable to people who do not know your child

LANGUAGE:

- Has an expressive vocabulary of 900-1000 words by age 3
- Combines 3-word phrases
- Starts to understand the difference between opposites
- Begins to follow simple 2-step directions
- Begins to name objects when requesting
- Answers simple "wh" questions

SPEECH AND LANGUAGE MILESTONES 3-4 YEARS

SPEECH:

- By 4 years-old, can produce the following sounds: l, j, ch, s, z, v, sh
- Produces sounds at the beginning, middle, and end of words
- By 4-years-old, most of their speech is understandable

LANGUAGE:

- Has an expressive vocabulary of 1,500 words by age 4
- Begins to use 4-word sentences
- Begins to follow 3-step directions
- Uses more correct grammar when speaking (e.g. plurals, past tense, pronouns, articles "a, the")
- Answers more complicated "wh" questions
- Tells you a story from a book or video



A Quick Look at Milestones Continued...

SPEECH AND LANGUAGE MILESTONES 4-5 YEARS

SPEECH:

- By 5 years-old, can produce the following sounds: r, zh, th (voiced - "the")
- Speech should be understandable in conversation

LANGUAGE:

- Has an expressive vocabulary of 2,100-2,200 words by age 5
- Produces 4-5 word sentences that are grammatically correct 90% of the time
- Understands location words, such as "behind, beside, between"
- Follows simple directions and rules to play a game
- Includes main characters, settings, and connected ideas to tell stories

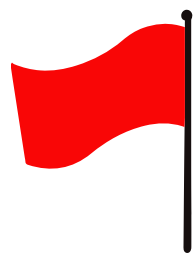
SPEECH AND LANGUAGE MILESTONES 5-6 YEARS

SPEECH:

- By 6 years-old, can produce the following sounds: th (voiceless - "bath").
- Speech should be understandable in conversation

LANGUAGE:

- Has an expressive vocabulary of 2,600 words
- Has a receptive vocabulary of 20,000 to 24,000 words
- Uses sentences 5-6 words long
- Starts, follows along, and takes turns in conversations
- Uses a variety of sentence types and complexities
- Defines objects by their use (e.g. you write with a pencil)



Red Flags for Development

By ages 3-6, child cannot:

- Use verbal speech without repeating parts of words (e.g. "let's g-g-g-g-go)", prolonging sounds (e.g. "ssssssee you later"), or becoming "stuck" before getting a sound/word out.
- Find the right word to say or describe without difficulty.
- Begin to combine 5-6 word sentences.
- Be understood by both people who are familiar and unfamiliar to them.
- Repeat themselves without frustration when they are not understood.
- Correctly produce all vowel and consonant sounds (by age 6).
- Ask and answer simple questions.
- Follow simple directions.

References:

ASHA (n.d.). Communication Milestones: Age Ranges. American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. Retrieved August 13, 2025, from <https://www.asha.org/public/developmental-milestones/communication-milestones/>

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McLeod, S. & Crowe, K. (2018). Children's consonant acquisition in 27 languages: A cross-linguistic review. *American Journal of Speech- Language Pathology*, 27, 1546-1571.

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