



How to talk with your toddler

18-36 Months

Introduction

Here are some guidelines to help you check your toddler's speech and language development. You will also find some ways that you can stimulate your child's speech and language at different ages.

From 18 to 24 months of age most toddlers will:

- Point to five body parts on themselves or dolls.
- Recognize pictures of familiar objects and people.
- Follow simple two step directions, e.g. "Pick up the ball and give it to me."
- Use many vowel sounds and some consonant sounds such as p, b, m, n and w. Some words may not be complete, e.g. "ba" for ball.
- Start to put two words together to make short sentences, for example: "Mommy go." "More juice."
- Have a speaking vocabulary of 50 or more words.

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What you can do to help your toddler communicate:

- Be a good speech and language model for your toddler. Speak in short, simple, clear sentences using real words.
- Talk about your everyday activities while you do them. Give the names of objects and people. Repeat words often.
- When your toddler says a word incorrectly, simply use the word properly in a sentence. For example, if your toddler says "tup" for "cup", you could say "Yes, big cup." Your child need not repeat the word back.
- Play with your child using toys your child picks. Copy what they do and show them other ways to use the toys.
- Look at books often. Talk together about the objects in the pictures; what they are called, what they are used for, and how they remind you of real experiences your child has had.

From 24 to 30 months of age most toddlers will:

- Understand simple questions and commands, such as “Where is the ball?” or “Go to bed.”
- Listen to short stories, especially those heard before.
- Begin to understand concepts such as big/little and happy/sad.
- Use their own name and pronouns such as I, me and you.
- Use some plural words such as “cups”.
- Use sentences of two to four words. Many words may not yet be pronounced clearly.

What you can do to help your toddler communicate:

- Play and talk with your toddler as much as possible.
- Expand upon what your child is saying by adding another sentence or two to what is said.
- Talk about people, animals, body parts, emotions and things you can feel, taste, smell, see or hear.
- Use concepts such as in/out, on/off, on/under, big/little, tall/short and in front/behind often.
- As you look at books, talk about what the objects or characters on the pages are doing or feeling. Try to make comments rather than ask questions.

At 36 months of age most toddlers will:

- Understand and follow simple directions.
- Answer simple “What”, “Where”, and “When” questions.
- Use three to five-word sentences that are understood by people outside the immediate family 75 per cent of the time.
- Take turns and stay with one activity for up to ten minutes.
- Understand common objects that go together, such as things we eat and things we wear.

What you can do to help your toddler communicate:

- Pay attention to your toddler when they are talking to you. Phrases such as “Tell me more” and “Tell me about it” can encourage children to talk more about their feelings and experiences.
- If they say something incorrect, do not correct them. Instead, just rephrase what they said in a better way. For example, if your child says “Tar doing in” you could say “Yes, the car is going in the garage.”
- Ask questions that can be answered with more than a “Yes” or “No”, such as “What’s happening?” or “What do you see?”
- Play games that help your toddler follow instructions such as action songs (e.g. Hokey Pokey) and finger plays (e.g. Eensy,Weensy Spider).
- Read and tell stories. Encourage your child to describe what’s happening and to fill in the parts of the story they know.

Stuttering

Many children between the ages of two and five years of age will repeat sounds or words. For example, “I...I...I...want to go out out side.” This is usually quite normal, as young children are still learning how to put words together to express themselves.

They often do not know how to speak smoothly, so they repeat sounds or words, pause, back up and hold onto sounds. Avoid labeling this as “stuttering”. This will only make the child feel self-conscious and bad about talking. You can help by listening to what your child is talking about rather than how they are saying it.

If you are concerned about your child’s speech and language development, or would like more information, please contact the speech-language pathologist or public health office in your region.