

Language Milestone Tracker

Month-by-month receptive and expressive language milestones from birth to 5 years

Language development follows a predictable trajectory, though individual children vary by several months on specific milestones. This tracker covers both receptive language (understanding) and expressive language (production). Check off milestones as you observe them. If your child is consistently missing milestones by 3+ months across multiple areas, consider a speech-language evaluation.

Birth to 3 Months

AGE	RECEPTIVE (UNDERSTANDING)	EXPRESSIVE (PRODUCTION)
0-1 mo	Startles to loud sounds; calms to familiar voice	Cries to communicate needs (hunger, discomfort)
1-2 mo	Recognizes parent's voice; turns toward sounds	Coos — vowel-like sounds ('oo', 'ah')
2-3 mo	Responds to speech by looking at speaker's face	Social smiling; varied cooing with pitch changes

3-6 Months

AGE	RECEPTIVE (UNDERSTANDING)	EXPRESSIVE (PRODUCTION)
3-4 mo	Responds to changes in tone of voice (happy vs. stern)	Laughs; vocal play with squeals and growls
4-5 mo	Responds to own name; looks toward named family members	Babbling begins — consonant-vowel combos ('ba', 'ma', 'da')
5-6 mo	Understands 'no' (stops briefly); notices music	Reduplicated babbling ('bababa', 'mamama')

6-12 Months

AGE	RECEPTIVE (UNDERSTANDING)	EXPRESSIVE (PRODUCTION)
6-7 mo	Turns to look when you point at something	Variegated babbling ('bagida'); imitates speech sounds

AGE	RECEPTIVE (UNDERSTANDING)	EXPRESSIVE (PRODUCTION)
7-8 mo	Understands a few common words in context ('bottle', 'up')	Uses gestures with vocalizations (reaches + sounds)
8-9 mo	Follows simple commands with gestures ('come here' + hand motion)	Uses specific babble patterns for specific things (jargon)
9-10 mo	Recognizes names of common objects (looks at correct one when named)	Points to request; may say first word ('mama', 'dada' with meaning)
10-12 mo	Understands ~50 words; follows 'give me the ___'	1-3 real words; lots of jargon that sounds like sentences

12-18 Months

AGE	RECEPTIVE (UNDERSTANDING)	EXPRESSIVE (PRODUCTION)
12-14 mo	Points to several body parts when named; follows 1-step directions without gestures	Uses 3-10 words; lots of pointing + single words
14-16 mo	Understands simple questions ('Where's daddy?'); identifies familiar objects in pictures	Vocabulary grows to 10-25 words; uses words more than gestures
16-18 mo	Follows 2-step related commands ('get your shoes and bring them here')	Vocabulary explosion begins: 25-50 words; may start combining 2 words

18-24 Months

AGE	RECEPTIVE (UNDERSTANDING)	EXPRESSIVE (PRODUCTION)
18-20 mo	Points to pictures in a book when named; understands action words (eat, run, sleep)	50-100 words; regular 2-word combinations ('more milk', 'daddy go')
20-22 mo	Understands pronouns (me, you); follows unrelated 2-step commands	100-200 words; telegraphic speech ('big doggy run')
22-24 mo	Understands size concepts (big/little); understands 'in', 'on', 'under'	200-300 words; 2-3 word sentences; asks 'what's that?'

Ages 2-3

AGE	RECEPTIVE (UNDERSTANDING)	EXPRESSIVE (PRODUCTION)
24-30 mo	Understands action words in context; identifies objects by function ('what do you drink from?')	300-500 words; 3-word sentences; uses 'I', 'me', 'you'; asks 'why?'
30-36 mo	Understands basic time concepts (now, later, soon); follows 3-step commands	500-1000 words; 3-4 word sentences; speech ~50-75% intelligible to strangers

Ages 3-4

MILESTONE	EXPECTED
Vocabulary	1,000-1,600 words
Sentence length	4-5 words average
Speech intelligibility	75-100% intelligible to strangers
Grammar	Uses plurals, past tense (-ed), possessives ('mommy's')
Questions	Asks and answers who, what, where questions
Narrative	Can retell a simple story with prompting
Concepts	Understands colors, shapes, counting to 5-10
Conversation	Takes turns in conversation; stays on topic for 2-3 exchanges

Ages 4-5

MILESTONE	EXPECTED
Vocabulary	1,600-2,500 words; understands 10,000+
Sentence length	5-8 words; uses complex sentences ('because', 'so', 'if')
Speech intelligibility	100% intelligible; may still struggle with r, l, s, th
Grammar	Most grammar rules mastered; occasional errors with irregular forms ('goed' for 'went')
Questions	Asks and answers how, when, why questions
Narrative	Tells a story with beginning, middle, end; recounts events in order

MILESTONE	EXPECTED
Concepts	Understands time (yesterday, tomorrow); knows letters and letter sounds
Social language	Adjusts speech for listener (talks differently to babies vs. adults)

IMPORTANT

These are TYPICAL milestones, not rigid deadlines. Bilingual children may hit some milestones slightly later in each individual language but should show normal total communication ability. If you have concerns about your child's language, seek an evaluation from a speech-language pathologist — early intervention is far more effective than waiting.