

Milestones of speech, language and communication development

30 - 36 Months

The rate of children's speech and language development can vary, depending on the child. Some children will develop certain skills quicker than others, and some children will be slow to develop certain skills compared to their peers, even if there are no related problems. This information sheet is just a general guideline, and many experts vary considerably on what they believe to be the normal stages of development.

You will see that many skills mentioned are repeated over several age groups as children are all different and some take longer to develop these abilities. So just use this chart as a very general guideline rather than read too much into it. There also may be some difference between boys and girls and when they develop certain skills.

To try and make this chart easier to read I have created a made-up child called Bill. Bill was lucky, he had a childhood free of any illness or accidents and he had pro-active parents who played with him and gave him lots of quality 1:1 attention and play-time

The milestones information sheets focus on 6 areas of development:

- Speech and Auditory Awareness
- Expressive Language and semantics (content)
- Social use of Language (use and pragmatics)
- Receptive language (comprehension, perceiving and understanding) and cognition
- Morphology and syntax (structure)
- Gross and fine motor skills

During the 30 - 36 month period of development Bill's expressive language continues to increase at a rapid rate and he is now using verbs, adjectives, prepositions and pronouns. He can now understand and follow a requests at a 3-word level.



Speech and Auditory Awareness: 30 - 36 Months

Bill's speech continues to develop and he now has **m n p b t d w ng k g h y** in his sound inventory and is starting to use **f s**, although these sounds may still be stopped (replaced with a plosive sound e.g. "sun" becomes "tun"). Other common substitutions will be to replace **th** with **f** and **r** with **w**. Some sound combinations are still difficult for him including clusters (**st, pl, tr** etc) and he will often just shorten these to 1 sound, and medial sounds may still occasionally be omitted.

His speech is now so clear that strangers understand him 75% of the time. He is also using more stress and intonation correctly in his words, although he may still omit some parts of less stressed speech.

Bill will now listen more from a distance and his auditory memory can hold 2-3 items in different linguistic contexts.

Expressive Language and semantics (content): 30 - 36 Month

Bill is now using around 450 words and combining nouns, verbs, and adjectives (big / little) and in 3 word sentences. He regularly uses prepositions in/on/under, personal pronouns you/me/he/she/they/we and knows gender vocabulary. Bill is also beginning to form plurals and putting -ing endings on verbs.

Now that Bill can put more words together he is asking more questions. He is able to recite common nursery rhymes, name 3 or more colours and can give his first and last name.

Social use of Language (use and pragmatics): 30 - 36 Months

Verbal language is now Bill's primary means of expression and speech has become a social tool and will often ask permission before he does things. Bill can also express how he feels about a situation. He is now able to have 2-3 exchanges with a listener and he is keen to talk about immediate experiences, as well as things that have happened before.

At play is more keen to share objects and toys generally, but he may also talk to himself during play.



Receptive language (comprehension, perceiving and understanding) and cognition

Bill is comprehending commands at a 3-word level and language of more complexity. He is also able to identify objects by use, e.g. "Which one do we drink out of? Sleep in? Sit on?". He understands the concept of "one" and "one more" and matches colours and shapes, and objects to pictures. As Bill's knowledge of concepts are developing he is learning how to sort, sequence (completes 3 piece interlocking puzzle), categorize and attempting simple counting. Bill's awareness of time is also developing and he understands today, yesterday, tomorrow.

Morphology and syntax (structure): 30 - 36 Months

Bill is now using three word sentences (and occasionally 4-word) and his understanding of more complex sentences continues to develop e.g. he understands instructions involving pronouns, e.g. "I want a cup." "Show me my cup," "your cup," "mine".

He is asks simple questions "What doing?" as well as answering "Who," "What", "Where" and "Why" questions. Bill is also beginning to form plurals and putting -ing endings on verbs.

Bill is also using:

Negation - "no, don't"

Pronouns - "he/she/they/we/you/me"

Some plurals

Possessives - "mine, yours, mummy's hat"

More negatives - "not/none/nobody"

Beginning to use conjunctions - "and/because"

Gross and fine motor skills: 30 - 36 Months

Bill can now walk up the stairs on alternate feet and is becoming quite an agile climber. He can run and walk on tiptoe, and run and avoid objects.

His fine motor skills are also developing further and he can now take off and put on most of his clothes, but still has a few problems with buttons. At kindergarten he is now copying a cross and drawing a body with head and one other body part. He is also cutting with scissors.

To learn more about child development, speech and language development, and what to do if your child has a speech and language delay visit our website

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Suggested Reading

The Wonder Years: Helping Your Baby and Young Child Successfully Negotiate The Major Developmental Milestones by American Academy Of Pediatrics (Author), Tanya Remer Altmann

Developing Child, The by Helen Bee and Denise Boyd

Milestones: Normal Speech And Language Development Across the Lifespan by Jr., Ph.D. Oller, et al John W.

Child Development by Laura E. Berk

Ages and Stages: A Parent's Guide to Normal Childhood Development by Charles E. Schaefer and Theresa Foy DiGeronimo

Child Development, Second Edition: A Practitioner's Guide (Social Work Practice with Children and Families) by Douglas D Davies

Child Development by Robert S. Feldman

What's Going on in There? : How the Brain and Mind Develop in the First Five Years of Life by Lise Eliot

Child Development: Principles and Perspectives by J. Littlefield Cook & G. Cook

Let's Talk Together - Home Activities for Early Speech & Language Development by Amy Chouinard and Cory Poland

Born to Talk: An Introduction to Speech and Language Development by Lloyd M. Hult and Merle R. Howard

Speaking, Listening and Understanding: Games for Young Children by Catherine Delamain and Jill Spring

Childhood Speech, Language & Listening Problems: What Every Parent Should Know by Patricia McAleer Hamaguchi

The Parents Guide to Speech and Language Problems by Debbie Feit

The Handbook of Child Language Disorders by Richard G. Schwartz

Does My Child Have a Speech Problem? by Katherine L. Martin

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