

## **Milestones of speech, language and communication development**

### **0 - 12 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 reading 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 proactive 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) - not described in 0 -18 month olds
- Gross and fine motor skills

The 0 -12 month period of development is a fascinating period. In this 12 month period Bill starts to make sounds and possibly utter his first word. He starts to link words with objects or people as his understanding of the world begins to develop. He is also learning key social skills such as eye contacting, smiling, and initiating communication to get a response.



## Speech: 0 - 12 Months

### Birth - 6 months The first communication.

In the early months Bill has no recognisable speech but he is communicating. In the first 2 months after birth he will be making reflexive crying sounds when hungry or uncomfortable. By two months he will be starting "coo" in response to his mothers voice. By six months, Bill will start to make some sounds, will laugh and squeal, but will still cry loudly when hungry, uncomfortable or annoyed.

### 6 - 8 months Babbling.

Bill starts to babble. Babbling is not only maturational but is also linguistic and relies on both visual and auditory input as the baby is learning. This is highlighted by blind children who use less labial sounds (sounds made with their lips) and deaf children who use more labial sounds (as these can be seen more easily).

### 8 - 10 months Babbling becomes more complex.

Bill is starting to combine consonants and vowels in babbling, e.g. "baba", and attempt to imitate other speech sounds. Some babies may even use a kind of singing voice when babbling.

### 10 - 12 months Jargon.

Bill now starts to use long chains of babbled sounds which include different intonation. He may talk to toys and attempt to sing along to music, and his vocalisations vary in intensity and volume. Bill may now be using sounds **p**, **b**, **m**, and **d** in his vocalisations.

### 12 months the first recognisable words.

Bill's parents are overjoyed when he starts uttering his first simple recognisable words e.g. "mama", "bye bye"

## Auditory Awareness: 0 - 12 Months

### Birth - 3 months Early awareness to sound.

Even at a very early age Bill will be responding to sounds by head turning, stilling, startling, responding to loud sounds and recognizing his caregivers/mothers voice and responding with a smile.

### 4 - 6 months discrimination.

Bill will now be discriminating his primary caregiver's voice from a stranger's and some sounds may be beginning to have meaning. He will also be listening more acutely to sounds.

### 7 - 12months assigning meaning to sounds.

Bill may now be able to associate meaning to sound and respond to his name. He may also be able to localise sounds with more accuracy and start to discriminate aspects of sounds such as pitch and intensity. Babies of this age will also start to enjoy music and singing and appear to listen to the conversations of others. One of the most important aspects of speech development also occurs around this time, the baby starts to distinguish speech from other sounds and is less distracted by other sounds, increasing attention to speech.



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## **Expressive Language and semantics (content): 0 - 12 Months**

### Birth -3 months - Intentional communication.

Bill's first intentional communication will be to vocalise for needs and wants, this is generally to express hunger and anger through crying.

### 4-6 months Responding.

Bill begins to respond more after 3 months with vocalisations to express pleasure and he may vocalise in response to singing.

### 6 - 10 months Babbling.

Bill develops babble over this period and it becomes more complex over time combining a few different consonants and CV (consonant-vowel) syllables. Bill may respond with babble when spoken to.

### 10 - 12 Jargon.

Bill uses jargon containing long chains of babbled sounds and it starts to sound more like speech, but usually without recognisable words. Along with this, the chains of babble will contain different levels of intensity intonation and pitch. He may occasionally vocalises to greet an adult and begin to use some gesture with language e.g. shaking head for "no".

## **Social use of Language (use and pragmatics) 0 - 12 Months**

### Birth - 3 months Looking at the speaker.

Several studies appear to show that an infant has an innate pre-disposition to focus on a human face, and this is often true with very young infants who appear to "listen" to a conversation and by 3 months are often looking directly at the speakers face, focussing on the speakers mouth rather than whole face.

### 4-6 months - Responding.

By this age Bill is learning to respond by smiling and cooing in response to a particular caregiver, and this response is likely to be followed by positive feedback from the caregiver, encouraging the infant to respond more. Crying begins to indicate different needs and emotions and Bill learns to reject by turning his head.

### 6-12 months Communication is a two-way process.

Bill is now responding to expression of emotion and sees communication as a two-way process. He has a desire to interact and may nod, wave and clap. Bill wants to get the attention of others and may do this vocally, becoming excited at familiar people. Shared attention and sharing experiences like looking at pictures becomes an enjoyable event for Bill. He is now learning that communication is fun and that by initiating communication he receives a positive response, this makes him want to initiate more and more.



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## **Receptive language (comprehension, perceiving and understanding) and cognition: 0 - 12 Months**

### Birth - 3 months Responding.

At this age Bill will not be understanding what is being communicated but will begin to respond to the face of a familiar person by quietening or smiling.

### 4 - 6 months Making sense of sounds.

At this age, Bill is starting to make some sense of the world around him and beginning to localize the sound source, respond to his own name, discriminate between a familiar carer and a stranger's voice, and between angry and friendly tones. Bill will also start to explore, reaching out for objects and bringing objects to his mouth.

### 7 - 9 months Understanding.

Bill will start to respond to others and communicate with arm gestures and vocalisations. We may also see the beginnings of cause and effect understanding and as this develops he will repeat the same actions as he realises he has control of events. Bill may be able to recognise a couple of words by localising objects when named and can take objects out of a container. An activity may be stopped when he hears the words "no-no" or his name is called. He also begins to recognize the names of familiar people.

### 9-12 months Understanding and Interacting.

Bill is now becoming a more interactive communication partner, giving objects, pointing and showing. His understanding of common words is increasing, he has an awareness of familiar people and situations and he understands phrases in set contexts e.g. "ready, steady, go!" Bill is also exploring more and more and is able to move objects from one hand to another and sometimes able to hold one object and pick up another with a different hand. His ability to follow simple commands is also increasing (e.g. "put that down", "stop that") although he is likely to get visual and intonation cues which will help him understand these commands.



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## Gross and fine motor skills: 0 - 12 Months

### Birth - 3 months - Early motor development.

Bill does not have a great deal of control or mobility at this time, but does have a few motor skills to cope with the first few months of life. In these early weeks his head will be floppy and he will need to be supported. Bill will observe his mothers face, turn towards light and will be able to make jerky kicks when on his back. At this time his thumb will rest in his palm and he will have an automatic grasp but won't be able let go. Bill should be able to suck well to feed.

### 3-6 months Getting stronger.

Bill will begin to be able to hold his head up independently, and later lean on forearms and raise his head. As the months progress he will attempt to roll from front to side and will sit up with support. Bill will become more visually alert and gaze around, reach out and touch objects that he looks at, and begin to take an interest in an object in hand.

### 6-9 months Exploring.

Bill can roll from back to stomach, can sit alone and is learning to get up on all fours. He is able to pass an object from one hand to the other and is mouthing objects more often.

### 9-12 months Moving about.

Bill can now roll to change positions, sit and is crawling. He will attempt to stand with support and may walk a little with support or holding on. He will also respond to music with body or hand movement.

*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 [www.icommunicatetherapy.com](http://www.icommunicatetherapy.com).*



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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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