

What is language?

Language is how we understand and use words to share our thoughts, needs, and ideas with others. It's not just about talking — it's also understanding what others say and knowing how to put words together to make sentences.

Children learn language by listening, watching, and communicating with people around them. As they grow, they learn more words and begin to use longer sentences to express themselves clearly.

12 months

Check the milestones below your child has reached by 12 months:

Receptive (understanding) language

- Responds to name
- Recognises familiar people
- Understands “no” or “bye-bye”
- Understands simple instructions with gestures “give it to me” or “sit down”

Expressive (using) language

- Babbles using a variety of sounds
- Tries to copy sounds, words or gestures
- Waves “bye-bye” or “hello”
- Says one or two words such as “mama” or “dada”

2 years

Check the milestones below your child has reached by 2 years:

Receptive (understanding) language

- Understands common everyday words such as body parts, toys or foods
- Follows 2-step instructions such as “pick up the toy and give it to me”
- Understands simple Wh- questions such as “who is this?” or “what is this?”

Expressive (using) language

- Uses 50+ words
- Forms 2-3 word phrases such as “more juice” or “I want mum”
- Asks simple Wh- questions such as “where mummy?”

3 years

Check the milestones below your child has reached by 3 years:

Receptive (understanding) language

- Understands prepositions such as 'in' 'under'
- Follows 2-3 step instructions
- Understands 'who', 'what', 'where' questions

Expressive (using) language

- Uses over 200+ words
- Forms 3-4 words sentences "I want the bear"
- Asks Wh- questions such as "what is this?" or "where is daddy?"

4-5 years

Check the milestones below your child has reached by 4-5 years:

Receptive (understanding) language

- Understands time concepts such as 'before' or 'later'
- Follows 3 step instructions
- Understands 'how' and 'why' questions

Expressive (using) language

- Form longer, complex sentences (4-6 words)
- Tells simple stories with a clear beginning, middle and end
- Asks 'how', 'why' and 'when' questions

What should I do if I am worried about my child's language development?

It's never too early to get help for your child's language development. You can talk to your local GP or contact a Speech Pathologist directly to book an assessment and find out how to best support your child's communication.

You can contact our friendly reception team at Socle Therapy & Learning 8068 1850 to book an assessment with one of our Speech Pathologists.

Ways to build language at home

1. Talk to Your Child

- Describe what you are doing: “I’m pouring juice,” “We are putting on your shoes.”
- Use simple sentences and repeat key words.
- Talk about what your child is interested in.

2. Listen and Respond

- Give your child time to respond, even with sounds or gestures.
- Show you are listening by nodding, smiling, and making eye contact.

3. Read and Tell Stories

- Read books every day, even short ones.
- Point to pictures and name objects, actions, and characters.
- Ask simple questions: “Where’s the cat?” or “What color is this?”

4. Sing Songs and Use Rhymes

- Songs, rhymes, and fingerplays help children learn new words and sentence patterns.

5. Play and Pretend

- Use toys, dolls, or everyday objects to practice words and sentences.
- Model language during play: “The car goes fast,” “The doll is sleeping.”

6. Expand on What They Say

- If your child says one word, add a word or two:
 - Child: “Dog” → Parent: “Yes, big dog!”
 - Child: “Go to park” → Parent: “Yes, we are going to the park.”

7. Make Language Part of Daily Routines

- Mealtime, bath time, dressing, and shopping are all opportunities to talk and teach words.