

- Give a younger child a chance to talk without being interrupted by older brothers and sisters.
- If your child is stumbling over words because he is excited suggest that he tell you slowly. Then listen to him carefully.
- Get down to eye level with your child when teaching a new word so he can see your lips and hear the word clearly.
- For children with a severe hearing loss, it is important that their hearing loss is recognised before 6 months of age.

### Be concerned if your child:

- does not react to loud noises by the time she is one month
- does not turn her head to a noise or voice by three months. Hearing problems often cause speech difficulties
- does not start to make single sounds, e.g. 'ba ba' by eight or nine months
- does not babble or make other sounds when someone talks to her by 12 months
- is not starting to say single words by twelve months (the 'word' does not have to be clear, but it needs to be used for the same thing each time e.g. 'mmm' for mummy or 'bo-bo' for bottle)
- does not understand simple instructions by 2 years
- frequently repeats sounds or part-words, e.g. 'Wh-wh-where's my ba-ba-ball?'

- lengthens sounds or gets stuck on words, e.g. 'm-m-m-m' or 'da-a-a-a-ad'
- is embarrassed or worried when speaking.

If you have any concerns at any stage about your child's speech, talk to your local Child Health nurse or your doctor. Your child may need to see a speech pathologist (through local Child Development Centres, hospitals that provide services for children, or privately).

### Reminders

- Language development needs listening and talking.
- Use simple language.
- Sit or kneel down so you are on your child's level when she is talking to you.
- Spend time reading simple stories and rhymes, looking at picture books and singing songs.
- Help children to notice road signs and billboards.
- Learning language is important. It should also be fun.

### For more information contact

- Local Community Child Health Nurse
- Local Family Doctor
- Ngala Family Resource Centre Helpline  
8:00am–8:00pm 7 days a week  
Telephone (08) 9368 9368  
Outside metro area – Freecall 1800 111 546  
[www.ngala.com.au](http://www.ngala.com.au)
- Parent Help Centre/Parenting Line  
Telephone (08) 6279 1200 (24hr service)  
Outside metro area – Freecall 1800 654 432

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# learning to talk



Learning to talk is one of the most difficult and important steps that young children take. It helps them to make sense of the world, to ask for what they need and to be able to get on with other people. If you think about how difficult it is for adults to learn a different language you can get some idea of what it is like for an infant to learn to speak from having no language at all. Language and speech, like other development, takes place at different rates for different children.

## Steps in learning to talk

### The early months

- Long before they can speak, babies are listening to their parents and carers.
- They begin to make little noises and sounds which come before speech.
- If parents and carers imitate these, it is as if they are talking to the baby. This is the beginning of your baby learning to talk.
- By responding to your baby's needs when she cries, you show that you have heard her and that she matters. This is the beginning of communication.

### 8–12 months

- The early little noises turn into babbling, e.g. 'Da-da-da-da' and 'Ma-ma-ma-ma'.
- Babies are beginning to learn what some simple words mean even though they cannot say them, e.g. 'Mummy, Bottle, No'.
- There may be one or two single words.

- Babies wave 'bye-bye' when asked.
- They obey simple requests such as 'Give me the ball'.
- Children know their own names and respond to them.

### 12–18 months

- There is much babbling in the children's own jargon.
- The first single words appear, e.g. 'No, Dad, Dog'.
- Children can point to things that they know when they are asked to.
- They enjoy songs, music and books.



### 18 months – 2 years

- 18 month olds can know and use six or more words. 2 year olds may have 100 or more words. Many of the words may be unclear but the parent or carer can tell what is meant.
- 2 year olds can say their name.

- They can ask for simple things that they need, e.g. 'Drink'.
- Children start to join words together, e.g. 'Daddy home', 'All gone'.
- They copy the last part of sentences.
- They try out different speech sounds and make mistakes.

### 3–4 years

- Children begin to ask 'what?' and 'why?' questions.
- They talk in complex sentences that are mostly grammatically correct.
- They begin to separate the truth from make-believe.
- They can talk about yesterday, now and tomorrow and know what they mean.
- Their speech should be understandable most of the time.
- They are likely to talk to themselves as they do things.
- They can learn and join in simple rhymes and songs and enjoy stories and jokes.

### 4–5 years

- Children learn to adjust their language to the situation they are in. For example, they talk differently to their parents than they do to their friends.
- They ask 'when?' questions.
- They can talk about imaginary situations, e.g. 'I hope . . .'

- They still mix truth and make-believe.
- They like to tell stories.
- They can hold conversations with their friends and parents.
- They will be able to say their name, age and address if they have been taught this.
- 4 year olds enjoy making up words for fun and using toilet words, e.g. 'poo', 'bum'.
- Their speech is clearer but they still may not be using 'th', 'r', 'z', 's', and 'v'.

## What parents can do

- Talk to your baby right from birth and imitate her sounds.
- Name things and talk about what you are doing. Use simple words and sentences at first.
- Have conversations with your child at some time every day.
- Listen with interest when your child is talking to you. Don't interfere or correct your child's speech.
- Answer questions simply and clearly.
- Allow your child time to get out what she wants to say.
- Talk about pictures in books, and name things in the pictures.
- Sing songs and read rhymes.
- Take your children to the local library and read some stories to them. Then you can borrow or buy the ones that they particularly enjoy.