

What Is Language? What Is Speech?

Language is different from speech.

Language is made up of socially shared rules that include the following:

- What words mean (e.g., "star" can refer to a bright object in the night sky or a celebrity)
- How to make new words (e.g., friend, friendly, unfriendly)
- How to put words together (e.g., "Peg walked to the new store" rather than "Peg walk store new")
- What word combinations are best in what situations ("Would you mind moving your foot?" could quickly change to "Get off my foot, please!" if the first request did not produce results)

Speech is the verbal means of communicating. Speech consists of the following:

Articulation

How speech sounds are made (e.g., children must learn how to produce the "r" sound in order to say "rabbit" instead of "wabbit").

Voice

Use of the vocal folds and breathing to produce sound (e.g., the voice can be abused from overuse or misuse and can lead to hoarseness or loss of voice).

Fluency

The rhythm of speech (e.g., hesitations or stuttering can affect fluency).

When a person has trouble understanding others (**receptive language**), or sharing thoughts, ideas, and feelings completely (**expressive language**), then he or she has a **language disorder**.

When a person is unable to produce speech sounds correctly or fluently, or has problems with his or her voice, then he or she has a **speech disorder**.

In our example, Tommy has a **speech disorder** that makes him hard to understand. If his lips, tongue, and mouth are not moved at the right time, then what he says will not sound right. Children who [stutter](#), and people whose [voices](#) sound hoarse or nasal have speech problems as well.

Jane has a **receptive and expressive language disorder**. She does not have a good understanding of the meaning of words and how and when to use them. Because of this, she has trouble following directions and speaking in long sentences. Many others,

including adults with [aphasia](#) and children with [learning disabilities](#), have language problems.

Language and speech disorders can exist together or by themselves. The problem can be mild or severe. In any case, a comprehensive evaluation by a **speech-language pathologist** (SLP) certified by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) is the first step to improving language and speech problems.

Birth to One Year

What should my child be able to do?

Hearing and Understanding	Talking
<p>Birth-3 Months</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Startles to loud sounds • Quiets or smiles when spoken to • Seems to recognize your voice and quiets if crying • Increases or decreases sucking behavior in response to sound 	<p>Birth-3 Months</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makes pleasure sounds (cooing, gooing) • Cries differently for different needs • Smiles when sees you
<p>4-6 Months</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moves eyes in direction of sounds • Responds to changes in tone of your voice • Notices toys that make sounds • Pays attention to music 	<p>4-6 Months</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Babbling sounds more speech-like with many different sounds, including <i>p</i>, <i>b</i> and <i>m</i> • Chuckles and laughs • Vocalizes excitement and displeasure • Makes gurgling sounds when left alone and when playing with you
<p>7 Months-1 Year</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enjoys games like peek-a-boo and pat-a-cake • Turns and looks in direction of sounds • Listens when spoken to • Recognizes words for common items like "cup", "shoe", "book", or "juice" • Begins to respond to requests (e.g. "Come here" or "Want more?") 	<p>7 Months-1 Year</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Babbling has both long and short groups of sounds such as "tata upup bibibibi" • Uses speech or noncrying sounds to get and keep attention • Uses gestures to communication (waving, holding arms to be picked up) • Imitates different speech sounds • Has one or two words (hi, dog, dada, mama) around first birthday, although

sounds may not be clear

What can I do to help?

- Check your child's ability to hear, and pay attention to [ear problems and infections](#), especially when they keep occurring.
- Reinforce your baby's communication attempts by looking at him or her, speaking, and imitating his or her vocalizations.
- Repeat his or her laughter and facial expressions.
- Teach your baby to imitate actions, such as peek-a-boo, clapping, blowing kisses, pat-a-cake, itsy bitsy spider, and waving bye-bye. These games teach turn taking that is needed for conversation.
- Talk while you are doing things, such as dressing, bathing, and feeding (e.g., "Mommy is washing Sam's hair"; "Sam is eating carrots"; "Oh, these carrots are good!").
- Talk about where you are going, what you will do once you get there, and who and what you'll see (e.g., "Sam is going to Grandma's house. Grandma has a dog. Sam will pet the dog.").
- Talk about colors (e.g., "Sam's hat is red").
- Practice counting. Count toes and fingers.
- Count steps as you go up and down them.
- Teach animal sounds (e.g., "A cow says 'moo'").

One to Two Years

What should my child be able to do?

Hearing and Understanding	Talking
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Points to a few body parts when asked.• Follows simple commands and understands simple questions ("Roll the ball," "Kiss the baby," "Where's your shoe?").• Listens to simple stories, songs, and rhymes.• Points to pictures in a book when named.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Says more words every month.• Uses some one- or two- word questions ("Where kitty?" "Go bye-bye?" "What's that?").• Puts two words together ("more cookie," "no juice," "mommy book").• Uses many different consonant sounds at the beginning of words.

What can I do to help?

- Talk while doing things and going places. When taking a walk in the stroller, for example, point to familiar objects (e.g., cars, trees, and birds) and say their names. "I see a dog. The dog says 'woof.' This is a big dog. This dog is brown."
- Use simple but grammatical speech that is easy for your child to imitate.

- Take a sound walk around your house or in the baby's room. Introduce him/her to Timmy Clock, who says "t-t-t-t." Listen to the clock as it ticks. Find Mad Kitty Cat who bites her lip and says "f-f-f-f" or Vinnie Airplane who bites his lip, turns his voice motor on and says "v-v-v-v." These sounds will be old friends when your child is introduced to phonics in preschool and kindergarten.
- Make bath time "sound playtime" as well. You are eye-level with your child. Play with Peter Tugboat, who says "p-p-p-p." Let your child feel the air of sounds as you make them. Blow bubbles and make the sound "b-b-b-b." Feel the motor in your throat on this sound. Engines on toys can make a wonderful "rrr-rrr-rrr" sound.
- Expand on words. For example, if your child says "car," you respond by saying, "You're right! That is a big red car."
- Continue to find time to read to your child every day. Try to find books with large pictures and one or two words or a simple phrase or sentence on each page. When reading to your child, take time to name and describe the pictures on each page.
- Have your child point to pictures that you name.
- Ask your child to name pictures. He or she may not respond to your naming requests at first. Just name the pictures for him or her. One day, he or she will surprise you by coming out with the picture's name.

Two to Three Years

What should my child be able to do?

Hearing and Understanding	Talking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understands differences in meaning ("go-stop," "in-on," "big-little," "up-down"). • Follows two requests ("Get the book and put it on the table"). • Listens to and enjoys hearing stories for longer periods of time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has a word for almost everything. • Uses two- or three- words to talk about and ask for things. • Uses <i>k, g, f, t, d, and n</i> sounds. • Speech is understood by familiar listeners most of the time. • Often asks for or directs attention to objects by naming them.

What can I do to help?

- Use clear, simple speech that is easy to imitate.
- Show your child that you are interested in what he or she says to you by repeating what he or she has said and expanding on it. For example, if your child says, "pretty flower," you can respond by saying, "Yes, that is a pretty flower. The flower is bright red. It smells good too. Does Sam want to smell the flower?"
- Let your child know that what she or he has to say is important to you by asking him or her to repeat things that you do not completely understand. For example, "I know you want a block. Tell me again which block you want."
- Expand on your child's vocabulary. Introduce new vocabulary through reading books that have a simple sentence on each page.

- Name objects and describe the picture on each page of the book. State synonyms for familiar words (e.g., mommy, woman, lady, grown-up, adult) and use this new vocabulary in sentences to help your child learn it in context.
- Put objects into a bucket and have your child remove one object at a time, saying its name. You repeat what your child says and expand upon it: "That is a comb. Sam combs his hair." Take the objects from the bucket and help your child group them into categories (e.g., clothes, food, drawing tools).
- Cut out pictures from old magazines and make a scrapbook of familiar things. Help your child glue the pictures into the scrapbook. Practice naming the pictures, using gestures and speech to show how you use the items.
- Look at family photos and name the people. Use simple phrases/sentences to describe what is happening in the pictures (e.g., "Sam swims in the pool").
- Write simple appropriate phrases under the pictures. For example, "I can swim," or "Happy birthday to Daddy." Your child will begin to understand that reading is oral language in print.
- Ask your child questions that require a choice, rather than simply a "yes" or "no" answer. For example, rather than asking, "Do you want milk? Do you want water?", ask, "Would you like a glass of milk or water?" Be sure to wait for the answer, and reinforce successful communication: "Thank you for telling mommy what you want. Mommy will get you a glass of milk."
- Continue to sing songs, play finger games ("Where is Thumbkin?"), and tell nursery rhymes ("Hickory Dickory Dock"). These songs and games introduce your child to the rhythm and sounds of language.
- Strengthen your child's language comprehension skills by playing the yes-no game: "Are you a boy?" "Is that a zebra?" "Is your name Joey?"

Three to Four Years

What should my child be able to do?

Hearing and Understanding	Talking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hears you when you call from another room. • Hears television or radio at the same loudness level as other family members. • Answers simple "who?", "what?", "where?", and "why?" questions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talks about activities at school or at friends' homes. • People outside of the family usually understand child's speech. • Uses a lot of sentences that have 4 or more words. • Usually talks easily without repeating syllables or words.

What can I do to help?

- Cut out pictures from old catalogs. Then make silly pictures by gluing parts of different pictures together in an improbable way. For example, glue a picture of a dog to the inside of a car as if the dog is driving. Help your child explain what is silly about the picture.

- Sort pictures and items into categories, but increase the challenge by asking your child to point out the item that does not belong in a category. For example, a baby does not belong with a dog, cat and mouse. Tell your child that you agree with his or her answer because a baby is not an animal.
- Expand vocabulary and the length of your child's utterances by reading, singing, talking about what you are doing and where you are going, and saying rhymes.
- Read books that have a simple plot, and talk about the story line with your child. Help your child to retell the story or act it out with props and dress-up clothes. Tell him or her your favorite part of the story and ask for his or her favorite part.
- Look at family pictures, and have your child explain what is happening in each one.
- Work on comprehension skills by asking your child questions. Have him or her try to fool you with his or her own questions. Make this game playful by pretending that you have been fooled by some of his or her really hard questions.
- Expand on social communication and storytelling skills by "acting out" typical scenarios (e.g., cooking food, going to sleep, or going to the doctor) with a dollhouse and its props. Do the same type of role-playing activity when playing dress-up. As always, ask your child to repeat what he or she has said if you do not understand it completely. This shows that what he or she says is important to you.

Four to Five Years

What should my child be able to do?

Hearing and Understanding	Talking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pays attention to a short story and answers simple questions about them. • Hears and understands most of what is said at home and in school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses sentences that give lots of details ("The biggest peach is mine"). • Tells stories that stick to topic. • Communicates easily with other children and adults. • Says most sounds correctly except a few like <i>l, s, r, v, z, ch, sh, th</i>. • Says rhyming words. • Names some letters and numbers. • Uses the same grammar as the rest of the family.

What can I do to help?

- Talk about spatial relationships (first, middle, and last; right and left) and opposites (up and down, big and little).
- Offer a description or clues and have your child identify what you are describing.
- Work on forming and explaining categories (fruits, furniture, shapes).
- Follow your child's directions as she or he explains how to do something.
- Give full attention to your child when he or she is speaking, and acknowledge, praise, and encourage him or her afterward. Before you speak to your child, be sure to get his

or her undivided attention. Pause after speaking, allowing him or her to respond to what you have said.

- Build on your child' s vocabulary. Provide definitions for new words, and use them in context: "This *vehicle* is riding on the highway. It is a car. A bus is another kind of vehicle. So are a train and an airplane."
- Encourage your child to ask for an explanation if he or she does not understand what a word means.
- Point out things that are the same or different. Play games incorporating these concepts that he or she will encounter later in the classroom in reading readiness.
- Sort items into categories. Now try to sort them by pointing out more subtle differences between objects (e.g., rocks that are smooth vs. those that are rough, heavy vs. light, big vs. small). Again, have your child identify the object that does not belong in a given category, but now ask him or her to explain why the item does not belong.
- Expand on social communication and narration skills (telling a story) by role-playing. Play house, doctor, and store using dialogue, props, and dress-up clothes. Do the same with a dollhouse and its props, acting out scenarios and making the dolls talk.
- Read stories with easy-to-follow plots. Help your child predict what will happen next in the story. Act out the stories, and put on puppet shows of the stories. Have your child draw a picture of a scene from the story, or of a favorite part. You can do the same thing with videos and television shows, as these also have plots. Ask "wh" questions (who, what, when, where, or why) and monitor his or her response.
- Expand on your child' s comprehension and expressive language skills by playing "I Spy": "I spy something round on the wall that you use to tell the time." After your child guesses what you have described, have him or her give you clues about something that he or she sees.
- Give your child two-step directions (e.g., "Get your coat from the closet and put it on"). Encourage your child to give directions to explain how he or she has done something. For example, ask your child to explain how he made a structure out of Lego blocks. When playing doctor, ask your child to explain what she did to give the baby a checkup. Draw a picture, and write down your child's story as he or she tells it. Your child will soon grasp the power of storytelling and written language.
- Play age-appropriate board games with your child (e.g., "Candyland" or "Chutes and Ladders").
- Have your child help you plan and discuss daily activities. For example, have him or her make a shopping list for the grocery store, or help you plan his or her birthday party. Ask his or her opinion: "What do you think your cousin would like for his birthday? What kind of fruit do we need to buy at the store?"