

Keeping up with your child's Language development is part of raising a child

This is taken from a pamphlet about language development in children made by the ministry of education in Iceland

Language development

A small child learns a language by listening to and talking to their parents, siblings and others that are around them. Part of that is repeating words and phrases, a child plays with sounds and listens to repeating of words. Then the words come one by one, and the same repetitive behavior occurs. Most parents know the way they repeat and point to their nose, eyes, ears and mouth while the child is learning which one is which. They learn the names of family members and the names of things in their environment. A child loves songs, lullabies and rhymes, it listens for weeks before it tries to repeat them.

- Language development is a part of the growing development of the child. But by language development we mean vocabulary, pronunciation, sentence structure and grammar. A child that has limited intellectual-, emotional-, social- or motor development often has delays in language development as well or shows irregularity in development.
- We will list a few things that characterize different age periods. This is not meant to alarm you as parents in any way but only to educate you. Some deviation from the norm is to be expected because after all we are all different in some ways.

Babbling

The first sound that a child makes seems to be a natural response and the sound that is formed comes with in- and exhaling. When the child cries they use a short inhale and a long exhale and is a precursor for talking later on. The child only responds with small sounds the first few weeks to let you know they are happy, feel good, hungry or in pain.

- Little by little this evolves into, what we call, babbling. The child forms many sounds or series of sounds that do not exist in their language. It tries again and again, listens and repeats until it becomes a game for them. You must give the child time to listen to their voice. This is also a training period for the mouth. The child trains

the roof of their mouth by saying ka-ka, ga-ga, lips by saying ma-ma, ba-ba and tongue when they say da-da, ta-ta. The babbling slowly becomes social, the child for example listens and copies. Children that are hard of hearing or deaf start babbling the first few weeks but stop because they can't hear their own voice or others. Motor- and language development are connected and during the babbling period it is normal that the child displays erratic movements.

- Voice and facial expressions are crucial during this period. The child quickly learns how to interpret how your voice sounds, when your voice is comforting, when it's angry or surprised. They can also interpret your facial expressions and why you point long before they understand words and their meaning. A child expresses itself the same way as a grown up would. With movement and expressions, it stretches out its arms when they want something and makes a frown when they dislike something and so on. The child learns to sit, crawl, stand up and walk. That's how they explore its environment.

The first words

Little by little the child starts to understand that some of the sounds and series of sounds can have meaning and that the things around them have names. The first words usually come around 10-18 month old and we can say that a child has learnt its first word when they use it purposefully to communicate. During this period the vocabulary mostly consists of nouns like mama or paba (what things are called) but the child only uses one word sentences. For example: "Mama" can mean Mama can you pick me up, "ball" can mean I want that ball. The verbs come next (what they are doing). The child now uses two word sentences. For example, bear fall, mama work.

- Also, during this period, the child starts to babble in long intervals like they are trying to form a sentence without using words, but you can hear a rhythm in their babbling.

Two year old children

Around two and a half year old the child starts using a lot of words to communicate and asks a lot of questions. The child's vocabulary starts growing fast and starts using me when it's referring to themselves, starts to use prepositions, they start to explore plural words, and they will use the word "what" in most of their communications.

- Now the child's language is starting to form, and the child can communicate wants and needs, it can also tell you about small events in their life. The child listens while the adults talk and copies the words and that is why the adults in the child's life need to repeat words and sentences for them, it's usually while things are happening.
- Clumsy movements and short sentences characterize this period.

Three year old children

The language is still progressing fast and by the time the child is three years old it can use prepositions like *on, under, behind* and is starting to learn the gender of words. The child is starting to learn numbers and the concept of numbers 1, 2, 3. The child is also learning colors like red, yellow, green and blue and can answer questions about their name, gender and age if you ask them.

- The child uses he, she, it and the plural form of a word mostly correctly. The child can interact in a simple way and describe what they are doing. The child asks many questions that begin with *where, who, what*. Sentences and their grammar are evolving, and the child gets a better feel for the language. Children love to be read to at this age, they also love singing and listening to rhymes.
- Their balance is good, the child walks, runs, rides a bicycle, catches a ball with both arms and climbs. Their fine motor skills are still evolving but they can cut with scissors, thread beads, make a tower with blocks, turn pages in a book and draw circles. Some children draw a simple headman, which is a head with a lot of arms and legs.
- Many children at that age start to stutter or get stuck on the same word at the beginning of a sentence. This is called a child stutter. This is normal because they can't handle forming a full sentence yet because they are too eager to talk. Parents need to give the child time to form the sentence and listen to what they say not how they say it.

Four year old children

During this period the child starts asking questions all the time. The child asks often about the same things and events despite knowing the answer themselves, probably to get some sort of confirmation about their answer or to hear if an adult has the same answer. The child starts to enjoy having conversations with both grownups and other children, it starts to make up words, rhymes, learns bad words and nonsense and loves it. The child uses the

word *why* often. It's paramount that the parent answers the child every time even though they think the child knows the answer.

- Many children love fairytales, but they often find it hard to know the difference between what is real and what is make believe. During play time they start to tole play and mimic their grownups and how they talk to each other
- Gross motor skills have become more fluent, and the child likes to jump and even tries to jump on one foot. The child can catch a ball with their chest and both hands. Fine motor skills are better than before, and hand/eye coordination are getting more concise. It's getting easier for the child to arrange small blocks, follow a line with scissors, draw a picture and explain what is happening in a picture.

Five year old child

When a child becomes five years old their vocabulary does not increase as fast as before. The child is more mature and doesn't talk as much. At this time the sentences are more complicated, and the child has more control over grammar. Pronunciations is more or less normal, apart from a few exceptions. It gets easier to have a conversation and the child can follow and understand a conversation. Language is now the child's main medium to understand and sense its environment and it can solve difficult problems with ease.

- Body movements are delicate and fine motor skills are getting very concise. Many children at this age love doing projects that require these skills.

What can parents do?

The best way to enhance language development for your child is to talk to the child and read a book with them.

- Read to your child and talk about what is happening in the story. You can also ask the child to "read" the book by using the pictures and tell you what is happening in the story that way. Singing and doing rhymes is also a good source for language development.
- Talk to the child about themselves and their environment. For example, their name, names of their parents, siblings, birthdays, age, what their body parts are called and home address. Talk about the name of the days, the weather, the seasons. About colors, simple forms, different sizes, numbers, counting and other things.

- The premise for a child to learn is to play with them and talk to them. We use playtime to catch their attention and curiosity at the same time we are giving them time to play.
- Ideas for games and conversations: A child starts to learn colors by matching two of the same color. For example: You are wearing red socks, and I am wearing a red sweater. Or. Find two things that are the same color. You can find rhymes about colors in various children's books.
- A child can learn big and small relatively fast, but they need to enhance that concept by learning biggest, smallest, short, long, wide, thin. For example: When a child is playing with blocks or animals you can use these concepts. “Do you want the biggest block, I´m want the smallest one” and “The snake is so long”
- So that the child can understand words like in *front of, behind, beside, under, around* exc. They need to practice in real life and during playtime. For example: “The ball is behind the sofa” or “Beside the sofa”. When you play with toy animals you can practice by saying: “My cow is in front but yours is behind” or “My sheep are all under the pillow.”
- A child learns names of body parts when a parent or a grownup tells them what they are called when they are, for example, getting dressed or undressed. Talk about their foot, knee, thigh, heel and the soles of their feet. Talk about other body parts as well. Arm, shoulder, hand, elbow, palm and the back of their hand. The nursery rhyme about their fingers is also very good.
- Little by little a child learns numbers and concept of numbers. For example: A good numbers game is to count fingers and toes. Blocks and other things from the toybox is a good source for counting, finding how many of the same they have. While the child learns counting, they also learn *as much as, more of and less than*.
- A child can learn main concepts pretty fast if the parent or grownup that takes care of it uses them. For example: clothes are a main concept for a sweater, pants and mittens. Fruits are a main concept for apples, oranges and bananas. Animal for a cat, pig and dog. Furniture for a chair, table and sofa.
- Many people have board games and other games. A simple Lotto game might be suitable for the younger kids because there is a lot of repeating and matching together photos. For the older kids you might want to use a more complex Lotto game where they need to form longer sentences and describe what they must get for the right photo, maybe match together feet and shoes, mittens and hands.
- Children that are raised in a town or city seldom get to meet animals and their babies. That is why it is important to teach them what they are called from pictures or with toys. For example: the cat-Kitten, the cat meows and purrs and it drinks

milk. The cow-calf moos and the cow gives us milk. The horse-foal neighs and the horse has a mane, a cow has a tail, and a sheep has wool. You can find many nursery rhymes about animals in children's books.

- We have listed many things you can do to enhance your child's language development, but our number one rule is to listen to your child and correct the words that they might say incorrectly.
- Remember that all communication with your child can enhance their understanding and expression as well as enhance their intellectual-, emotional- and social development which in turn helps them later on in life.