Early Language Development

Audio can be heard here: [Early Language Development – Part 1](#) & [Early Language Development – Part 2](#)

As a parent, you may have questions about your child's early language development. You may also wonder when you need to be concerned about your child's language development. Refer to the information below and listen to the audio links above for helpful advice and general guidelines.

I. Acquisition of Words
- Expect first words between 12 and 18 months; there will probably be a "spurt" of language development before two years
- Expect using around 50 words between 18 and 24 months of age
- Expect (between ages 2-3) combining two-three words into phrases, asking simple questions and increasing vocabulary rapidly, acquiring 300-400 words by 3 years

II. Comprehension of Language
- Between 1 and 2 years your child should follow commands, demonstrate understanding of simple questions and point to simple pictures
- By 2 to 3 years your child should be able to follow two-part instructions ("Get your cup and put it in the sink")
- Children use contextual cues within routines to learn language; they should slowly become less reliant on these cues over time (e.g. when you get the keys to the car and ask them to get their coat and shoes they can because they know it is time to go, eventually they don't need the cue of your getting the keys, they can just follow the direction "get your coat and shoes")
- By 3 to 4 years they should understand 1500 words, recognize gender differences, plurals, pronouns, adjectives and colors

III. Sound Production and Intelligibility
- Most children can consistently produce the sounds /p, b, m, h, w, t, d, f, k, and g/ before the age of 3 ½
- Most children consistently produce the sounds /l, sh, ch, and v/ by the age of 5
- The sounds /s, z, th, and r/ can come later and have a greater range and variability for acquisition
- Intelligibility by age:
    - By 18 months a child's speech is normally 25% intelligible
    - By 24 months a child's speech is normally 50-75% intelligible
    - By 36 months a child's speech is normally 75-100% intelligible
      Lynch, Brookshire and Fox (1980)

IV. Social Communication and Play Skills
- Using language for different reasons – gaining attention, requesting, refusing, commenting, protesting, asking questions, etc.
- Trying to imitate both your words and your actions during play
- Noticing non-verbal aspects of language (e.g. shifting eye gaze, frowning, pointing to an object or person, head nod, moving away from something)
- Learning to take turns early, with babbling as an infant and within simple play routines as they get older

V. Knowing When to Seek Help and Items to Consider
- Trust YOUR judgment; follow your instincts
- Language development should be steady; it is not as important to consider if it is fast or slow
- Your child is not too young to be assessed
- Children who use a large number of gestures for different communication purposes are more likely to catch up with peers
- Good receptive language skills (understanding) can help distinguish late bloomers from late-talkers
- Watch for words being used in new ways and being combined in two-word phrases

VI. Where to Go
- Start with your pediatrician; keep a list of your concerns so that you can describe them accurately and follow a timeline
- Request a screening through your school district

VII. What to Do While You Wait
- Get on their level when you talk and play with them
- Follow their lead; watch what they are interested in and wait for them to show or tell you something
- Model language, but don't insist that they repeat it back to you

VIII. Suggested Resources
- *Speech, Language, and Hearing Milestones: Birth to Age Five*; DVD available from American Speech-Language Hearing Association (www.asha.org)
- *Talking on the Go* by Dorothy Doughtery, MA, CCC-SLP and Diane Paul, PhD, CCC-SLP; available from American Speech-Language Hearing Association and Amazon