

Receptive Language

Learning to Listen, and to Understand Language

Birth

Language learning starts at birth. Even new babies are aware of the sounds in the environment. They listen to the speech of those close to them, and startle or cry if there is an unexpected noise. Loud noises wake them, and they become "still" in response to new sounds.

0-3 months

Astoundingly, between 0-3 months babies learn to turn to you when you speak, and smile when they hear your voice. In fact, they seem to recognize your familiar voice, and will quiet at the sound of it if they are crying. Tiny babies under three months will also stop their activity and attend closely to the sound of an unfamiliar voice. They will often respond to comforting tones whether the voice is familiar or not.

4-6 months

Then, some time between 4 to 6 months babies respond to the word "no". They are also responsive to changes in your tone of voice, and to sounds other than speech. For example, they can be fascinated by toys that make sounds, enjoy music and rhythm, and look in an interested or apprehensive way for the source of all sorts of new sounds such as the toaster, birdsong, the clip-clop of horses' hooves or the whirr of machines.

7-12 months

The 7 to 12 months period is exciting and fun as the baby now obviously listens when spoken to, turns and looks at your face when called by name, and discovers the fun of games like: "round and round the garden", "peep-oh", "I see" and "pat-a-cake" (These simple games and finger plays will have regional names and variants). It is in this period that you realize that he or she recognizes the names of familiar objects ("Daddy", "car", "eyes", "phone", "key") and begins to respond to requests ("Give it to Granny") and questions ("More juice?").

1-2 years

Now your child points to pictures in a book when you name them, and can point to a few body parts when asked. He or she can also follow simple commands ("Push the bus!") and understand simple questions ("Where's the bunny?"). Your toddler now likes listening to simple stories and enjoys it when you sing songs or say rhymes. This is a stage in which they will want the same story, rhyme or game repeated many times.

2-3 years

By now your toddler will understand two stage commands ("Get your socks and put them in the basket") and understand contrasting concepts or meanings like hot / cold, stop / go, in / on and nice / mean. He or she notices sounds like the

telephone or doorbell ringing and may point or become excited, get you to answer, or attempt to answer themselves.

3-4 years

Your three or four year old understands simple "Who?", "What?" and "Where?" questions, and can hear you when you call from another room. This is an age where hearing difficulties may become evident. If you are in doubt about your child's hearing, see a clinical audiologist.

4-5 years

Children in this age range enjoy stories and can answer simple questions about them. He or she hears and understands nearly everything that is said to them at home or at pre-school or day care. Your child's ability to hear properly all the time should not be in doubt. If you are in doubt about your child's hearing, see a clinical audiologist. If you are in doubt about language comprehension, see a speech-language pathologist.

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