

A GUIDE TO COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR CHILD FROM AGE 1 TO 18

Communication and Your 1-2 Year Old

Language development really takes off during this time, especially as your baby approaches his second birthday. He is better able to comprehend what you say and express what he wants. He will take joy in his ability to understand more complex directions - and he won't hesitate to give you directions.

How does my baby communicate?

Most babies say their first words toward the beginning of this period, though some start even sooner and others don't start talking until they are nearly 2 years old. If your baby is preoccupied with learning to walk, he may push talking to the back burner; this is not unusual and nothing to be alarmed about.

Your baby may have learned fragments of dozens of words that probably won't be recognizable yet. When he gets around to talking, though, he'll probably progress quickly. He'll soon be able to point at something familiar and say its name, and recognize names of familiar people, objects and body parts. By two years, he may use phrases and even two- to four-word sentences.

No matter when your child says his first words, it's a sure bet he'll be understanding much of what you say to him well before that. He should be able to respond to commands ("Roll the ball to Mommy") and should be fully aware of the names of familiar objects and family members.

You will undoubtedly find yourself struggling with your toddler to do as you say, only to have him ignore you or scream in protest. He's merely testing your limits and his degree of control. By 18 months, he will probably have mastered saying "no" with authority, and by age 2 he may throw a tantrum when he's unwilling to do something you ask. He'll also show signs of possessiveness, and you'll frequently hear "mine" or see tears if something is taken away or you show attention toward someone else.

What should I do?

Your baby is listening to everything you say, and he's storing it away at an incredible rate. Instead of using "baby" words, teach him the correct names for people, places and things. Speak slowly and clearly, and keep it simple.

Your baby may still be communicating with gestures such as pointing to something he wants. Gestures are OK, but you should use a running commentary such as, "Do you want a drink?" (when he points to the refrigerator), then wait for a response. Then say, "What do you want? Apple juice? OK, let's get some apple juice." Such behavior encourages your baby to respond and participate in conversations. But don't frustrate your baby by withholding food or drink waiting for a response.

Between 15 months and 18 months, your baby will probably begin to enjoy language games that ask him to identify things, such as: "Where's your ear?" and "Where is Mommy?" His vocabulary will grow quickly, but his pronunciation isn't likely to keep pace. Resist the temptation to correct your baby's pronunciation; most babies mispronounce their words. Instead, emphasize the correct pronunciation in your response.

Should I be concerned?

Some babies don't talk until their second birthday and choose instead to get by with the use of gestures and sounds. Vocabulary varies widely at this age, too; some babies say dozens of words, others only a few.

Most babies this age have these communication milestones in common:

- Speak about 15 words by 18 months
- Put two words together to form a sentence by age 2
 - Follow simple directions by age 2

Hearing problems may become more apparent during this stage because of the emergence of speech. Don't hesitate to report any concerns you have to your doctor immediately, especially if you feel your child is not babbling or responding to your speech patterns. Sometimes chronic ear infections can leave children with excessive fluid buildup that can interfere with normal hearing. Special tests can check for hearing loss.

Communication and Your 2-3 Year Old

Why is it important to communicate with a child in this age group?

Communicating with your child, from infancy onward, is one of the most pleasurable and rewarding experiences for both parent and child. Children are avid learners at all ages, absorbing information through daily interactions and experiences with other children, adults, and the world.

How can parents communicate with a child in this age group?

The more interactive conversation and play a child is involved in, the more a child learns. Reading books, singing, playing word games, and simply talking to your child will increase her vocabulary while providing increased listening opportunities. Here are a few suggestions to help improve your child's communication skills:

- Talk to your toddler about what she did during the day or what she plans to do tomorrow. "I think it's going to rain this afternoon. What shall we do?" Or discuss the day's events at bedtime.
 - Play make-believe games.
- Read your child's favorite books over and over and encourage her to join in with words she knows. Encourage "pretend" reading (let your child pretend she is reading the book to you).

Typical vocabulary/communication patterns for a child in this age group?

Between the ages of 2 and 3, children experience a tremendous "growth spurt" in language skills. Although each child develops at her own individual pace, when it comes to language skills, by the age of 2, most children can follow simple directions and can speak about 50 to 200 words. By age 2, children may also begin to echo what they hear and begin to combine words in short phrases.

By about 2 1/2 years of age, a child should have at least 200 words in her vocabulary and use fragmented phrases and small phrases. She will also be able to follow additional instructions, such as "Come to Daddy." A 3-year-old child's vocabulary will be between 200 and 300 words, and, by this time, many children will begin to string words together in short sentences.

Kids at this stage of language development will understand more and speak more clearly, and they are usually able to use language to engage in a simple question-and-answer format. By age 3, children should be using language freely, experimenting with verbal sounds, and beginning to use language to solve problems and learn concepts.

What should parents do if they suspect a problem in communication?

Parents who suspect that their child is having trouble with hearing, language acquisition, or speech clarity should not hesitate to talk with their child's doctor. A hearing test can be one of the first referral/diagnostic measures to determine if there might be a hearing problem. If you suspect that your child has a hearing problem at any age, she should undergo an evaluation. Two years of age is not too young for a referral for a speech/language evaluation, particularly if a child is not following directions or answering "yes" or "no" to simple questions.

After an evaluation, the speech-language pathologist (an expert who evaluates and treats speech and language disorders) may recommend direct therapy, referral to a developmental pediatrician if there is suspicion of a global developmental delay (delay in more than one area of development, including gross motor, fine motor, problem solving, language, and social skills), early intervention services, or simply a follow-up assessment to see if a child will catch up.

Typical Communication Problems for This Age Group

Communication problems for 2- to 3-year-olds include:

- Hearing difficulties
- Problems following directions
- Poor vocabulary acquisition
- Speech dysfluencies (difficulty initiating or sustaining sounds)
 - Delayed acquisition of phrasing skills
 - Unclear speech

Problems - such as stuttering - may be a developmental process that some children will outgrow. For others, more intensive therapy may be needed. These communication problems can be helped by medical professionals, such as speech pathologists, therapists, or your child's doctor.

Communication and Your 4-5 Year Old

Why is it important for parents to communicate with a child in this age group?

Communicating with your child, from infancy onward, is one of the most pleasurable and rewarding experiences for both parent and child. Children are avid learners at all ages, absorbing information through daily interactions and experiences with other children, adults and the world.

Between the ages of 4 and 5, many children begin to enter preschool or kindergarten programs, making language competency necessary for better learning in the classroom.

How can parents communicate with a child in this age group?

The more interactive conversation and play a child is involved in, the more a child learns. Reading books, singing, playing word games, and simply talking to your child will increase his vocabulary while providing increased listening opportunities. Here are a few suggestions to help improve your child's communication skills:

- Help your child relate to books by selecting stories that mirror families like yours or people from your cultural or ethnic group.
- Make a special spot for books, magazines and other reading material where your child is able to reach books without help.
- Help your child create his own "This Is Me" or "This Is Our Family" album; then enjoy looking and talking about the photographs or special memorabilia.
 - Talk to your child about books or TV programs and videos you watch together.

What is a typical vocabulary/communication pattern for a child in this age group?

As children gain more mastery over their language skills, they become more sophisticated in their conversational abilities. A 4- to 5-year-old child follows complex directions and enthusiastically talks about things that happen to him. He can make up stories, listen attentively to stories and retell stories himself.

Children ages 4 to 5 are also able to understand that letters and numbers are symbols of real things and ideas, "write" as a way to tell stories and offer information, and "read" on their own.

Sentence structures now incorporate up to eight words, while vocabulary is between 1,000 and 2,000 words. Ninety percent of the time, speech should be clearly intelligible; although there may be some developmental sound errors and stuttering, particularly among boys.

Young preschoolers make comments and requests and tell others what to do. By 4 or 5, they should know the names and gender of family members and other personal information. They often play with words and make up silly words and stories.

What should parents do if they suspect a problem in communication?

Parents worried about a child's hearing, language acquisition, or speech clarity should not hesitate to consult with their child's doctor. A hearing test may be one of the first referral/diagnostic measures to determine if there has been a hearing problem. If the doctor suspects a specific communication deficit or delay, a referral for a speech-language evaluation may be recommended. If a child appears to be delayed in all areas of development, it may be more appropriate to refer him to a developmental pediatrician and/or psychologist.

After an evaluation, the speech-language pathologist (an expert who evaluates and treats speech and language disorders) may recommend direct therapy, preschool special education services, or possible referrals to an audiologist (a hearing specialist), developmental pediatrician, and/or psychologist.

Typical Communication Problems for This Age Group

Communication problems among children in this age group include:

- Hearing difficulties
- Problems following complex/compound directions
 - Difficulty with conversational interaction
 - Poor vocabulary acquisition
- Difficulty learning preschool concepts, such as colors and counting
 - Stuttering
 - Difficulties with grammar and syntax
 - Unclear speech

Common problems, such as stuttering, often may be a developmental process that some children will outgrow. For others, more intensive therapy may be needed. These communication problems can be helped by medical professionals, such as speech pathologists, therapists, **Communication and Your 6- to 12-**

Year-Old

Why is it important to communicate with a child in this age group?

Communicating with your child, from infancy onward, is one of the most pleasurable and rewarding experiences for both parent and child. Children are avid learners at all ages, absorbing information through daily interactions and experiences with other children, adults, and the world.

How can parents communicate with children in this age group?

As children enter their grade-school years they become increasingly independent, spending much of their days outside the home in school and with peers. Talking with your child is essential to bond with her and share ideas, opinions, and information.

Here are a few suggestions to aid communication with your child:

- Make time during the day or evening to hear about your child's activities; be sure she sees that you are actively interested and listening carefully.
 - Remember to talk with your child, not at her.
- Ask questions that go beyond "yes" or "no" answers to prompt more developed conversation.

- Take advantage of "stolen" moments, during car trips or standing in line at the supermarket, to talk with your child.
- Provide activities that offer opportunities to improve communication skills, such as attending or engaging in sporting and school events, talking about current events, and reading stories to younger children that are slightly above their competency level.

What is a typical vocabulary/communication pattern for a child in this age group?

As children progress in school, both their comprehension and usage of language will become more sophisticated. Usually, they will understand more vocabulary and concepts than they may express. Children should be able to engage in narrative discourse and share ideas and opinions in clear speech.

What should parents do if they suspect a problem in communication?

Parents need to have ongoing communication with their child's teacher about overall language skills and progress. Children with language comprehension and usage problems are at risk for increased academic difficulties.

If a child has a specific communication difficulty, such as persistent stuttering or a lisp, he should be referred to the school speech-language pathologist (an expert who evaluates and treats speech and language disorders). If this is the case, the parents should routinely communicate with the therapist regarding the therapy goals, language activities that are to be practiced at home, and progress.

If a school suspects a language-based learning disability, comprehensive testing will be necessary. This can include a hearing test, psychoeducational assessment (standardized testing to assess a child's learning style as well as cognitive processes as measured by normative values, such as IQ), and speech-language evaluation.

Typical Communication Problems for This Age Group

Problems in communication skills for children ages 6 to 12 years may include:

- Hearing difficulties
- Difficulty with attention, following complex/compound directions in the classroom
 - Difficulty retaining information
 - Poor vocabulary acquisition
 - Difficulties with grammar and syntax
- Difficulties with organization of expressive language or with narrative discourse
 - Difficulties with academic achievement, reading, and writing
 - Unclear speech
 - Persistent stuttering or a lisp
- Voice-quality abnormalities, such as a strained, hoarse quality (may require a medical examination by an otolaryngologist [an ear, nose and throat specialist])

These communication problems can be helped by medical professionals, such as speech pathologists, therapists or your child's doctor.

Communication and Your 13- to 18-Year-Old

Why is it important to communicate with a child in this age group?

During this period, teens spend much of their days outside the home - at school or at after-school activities and with peers. Parents need to take time every day to talk with teens to share opinions, ideas and information.

How can parents communicate with a child in this group?

As children enter their high school years they become increasingly independent, spending much of their days outside the home. Here are a few tips to help you communicate with your child:

- Make time during the day or evening to hear about your child's activities; be sure that she sees you are actively interested and listening carefully.
 - Remember to talk with your child, not at her.
- Ask questions that go beyond "yes" or "no" answers to prompt more developed conversation.
- Take advantage of "stolen" moments, during car trips or standing in line at the supermarket to talk with your child.
- Provide activities that offer opportunities to improve communication skills, such as attending or engaging in sporting and school events, playing table top games, talking about current events, and reading to younger children above their competency level.

What is a typical vocabulary/communication pattern for a child in this age group?

Adolescents essentially communicate in an adult manner, with increasing maturity throughout high school. Teens comprehend abstract language, such as idioms, figurative language and metaphors. Explanations may become more figurative and less literal. Literacy and its relationship to cognition, linguistic competency, reading, writing and listening are the primary focus in this age group. Teens should be able to process texts and abstract meaning, relate word meanings and contexts, understand punctuation, and form complex syntactic structures.

What should parents do if they suspect a problem in communication?

Parents need to have ongoing communication with their child's teacher about overall language skills and progress. In some cases, a child may have already been referred to the school speech-language pathologist (an expert who evaluates and treats speech and language disorders). If this is the case, parents should continue to routinely communicate with the therapist about goals, language activities that are to be practiced at home and progress.

If a school suspects a language-based learning disability, comprehensive testing will be necessary. This can include a hearing test, psychoeducational assessment (standardized testing to assess a child's learning style as well as cognitive processes as measured by normative values, such as IQ), and speech-language evaluation.

Attendance at parent-teacher conferences is essential to keep abreast of the child's school performance and any issues that may arise. If there is a communication or learning disability that has previously been identified, parents need to continue their ongoing communication with the child's teacher regarding overall skills and progress. At this point, tutoring for specific subjects may be most helpful.

If a child has a specific communication difficulty, such as persistent stuttering, he should be referred to the school speech-language pathologist. If this is the case, the parents should continue to routinely communicate with the therapist regarding the therapy goals, language activities that are to be practiced at home, and progress.

If the school suspects a language-based learning disability, comprehensive testing may be necessary. This may include a hearing test, a psychoeducational assessment and speech-language evaluation.

What are typical communication problems for this age group?

In most cases, language difficulties will have been identified before this time. However, very subtle problems may be reflected in increasing academic troubles.

Speech articulation problems are generally identified and treated well before adolescence. Persistent stuttering and vocal-quality problems such as hoarseness, breathiness or raspiness may require a medical evaluation by an otolaryngologist (an ear, nose and throat specialist).