



# Language Development 1

*Understanding how your child learns language*

## You & Your Child

A guide for  
new parents

How language is learned is one of the wonders of childhood.

Your child begins learning language at birth when you play, coo, and talk to your child.

Your child will probably be nearly 1 year old before he or she is able to speak even a few words meaningfully. But long before that, your baby will learn what some words mean and how to use language to communicate. It is a natural process and you help it along, sometimes without even being aware of it. For example, simply talking to your baby contributes to his or her language development.

How quickly or slowly your child's language develops depends on your child. The rate of children's language development is as individual as their personalities.

You can't really teach a baby to talk. But you can take steps to help your child develop language. To do that, it helps to know a little about how language develops.

**ON BACK**  
THE BASICS OF CHILDREN'S  
LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT.



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# UNDERSTANDING HOW YOUR CHILD LEARNS LANGUAGE

Development  
Ages  
Birth-4

## *Language development begins in infancy*

Babies are naturally interested in voices. Babies naturally make sounds, usually babbling sounds.

Most babies do a lot of babbling by 6 months.

Talking to your baby is important. Your baby likes to hear your voice. Even if your baby doesn't understand what you are saying, your voice becomes familiar and so does language.

When you speak, your baby learns that certain sounds are common in your language and your baby stays attuned to them.

## *Responding to your baby is important*

Babies will learn language at their own pace as long as they are surrounded by people who talk, listen, and respond to the sounds they make.

So when your baby coos, gurgles, or makes other sounds it is important that you respond as if he or she is talking to you.

Do not worry if your child does not say his or her first word at a specific age. Average ages for saying first words and other developmental milestones are only averages. They do not apply to each and every baby

## *Your baby learns by listening*

Babies learn language by connecting words with what they mean.

They learn the meaning of words by listening, not by saying. Listening to the words you use in your daily activities helps your baby understand the meaning of those words.

When your baby is 7–9 months old, try showing him or her an object or picture and labeling it by saying a word. For example, show your baby a ball and say "ball." After doing that a few times, ask "Where is the ball?" Don't be surprised if your baby looks at the ball when you say the word.



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## *Saying first words*

By 8 months, babies are often more alert to your voice and voices of other people. Babies start making words by first making sounds that resemble words, such as “da-da,” or “mum-ma.” Usually babies won’t say their first meaningful word until around the age of 10 months.

## *Vocabulary grows faster after 18 months*

A child’s vocabulary continues to grow after his or her first year. But between 12 and 18 months, vocabulary growth is often slow, with the child learning only about one or two words a month.

Often, by 18-24 months, children begin learning new words at a faster pace. Between 21-24 months, they may start using two word combinations, such as “my ball.” Between the ages of 24-36 months, toddlers may have a vocabulary of several hundred words.

## *Asking a lot of questions is common*

Around the age of 2 years, children start asking simple questions. For example, your child may point to an object and say “That?” He or she wants to know the name of the object. Your child may do this with just about every object he or she sees.

These kinds of question may be annoying, but they are important. Make sure you answer your child.

At age 3 years, children start asking a lot of questions. It means they are making progress in developing language. They commonly ask “what” questions and “why” questions. Try not to become irritated, and answer the questions as simply as you can.

## *Language improves with practice*

Some 4-year-olds can speak very well, but they are still learning and may be stumbling with language. The way children learn to master the complexities of language is by being allowed to try. Allow your child to talk. Be patient, listen, and respond.



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