

Patterns of Development – Birth to Four

Please note: Children develop at different rates and some will follow a different pathway to learning. These are only guidelines to provide some advice. Interpret carefully and use your professional judgement, seeking advice where necessary.

0–6 months



What to look out for	How to help develop
Copies gestures e.g. claps, waves goodbye.	Use exaggerated gestures when talking to children, animated facial expressions and a range of different sounds.
Makes babbling noises, mama, dada etc.	Respond to baby's babble, copy what they are saying, 'chat back' to them, let them know that their communication is meaningful. Sing songs and clap along to rhythms.
When given an object will demonstrate understanding by using it appropriately e.g. brushing hair with a hairbrush.	Provide a range of everyday objects to play with. Demonstrate and model how they are used and allow baby to copy you.
Smiles in response to others smiling at them.	Smile back when baby smiles at you.
Begins to recognise words like 'daddy', 'mummy', 'juice'.	Show objects and name them when using them with baby. Gain baby's attention, say the word and respond to any attempt baby makes to copy what you say.
Turns to someone coming into the room and responds to them.	Speak to baby when you enter the room, use gesture and an animated tone of voice to greet baby.
Listens to others talking and babbles in a conversational manner.	Have special time with baby, talk and share books.

12-18 months



What to look out for	How to help develop
Acts out simple routines e.g. puts teddy to bed.	As you carry out simple routines with the child give toddler a teddy or dolly so they can copy you.
May start to recognise miniature toys (around 18 months).	Provide a small doll to play with the big dolly, demonstrate how both can eat, sleep etc.
Understands between 100 and 200 words.	Don't ask, 'What's this', instead give the child the object and name it, 'it's a car'. Put the emphasis on the word you want them to listen too.
Babble increasingly sounds like words. May say up to 20 recognisable words.	Respond to any sounds the baby makes as if they are real words. Say the single word back to them clearly, 'Yes' it's a dog!'
May copy what the adult says, especially the end of the sentence.	Encourage copying as well as adding new words or noises.
Enjoys communicating with others, laughs and squeals when others interact with him/her.	Make talking and communication fun! Take turns in games and talking. Enjoy rough and tumble play (within limits!).
Begins to point to basic body parts e.g. eyes, nose etc.	Sing songs like' "head, shoulders, knees and toes. Name simple body parts on yourself and the child.

18-24 months



What to look out for	How to help develop
Increased understanding of between 200-500 words	Share books, objects and toys with the child and name them giving emphasis to the word you want them to hear.
Will play with miniature toys, recognising them as representing the real object	Provide a range of miniature toys for the child to play with and model how to use them.
May say up to 50 or more single words. May start to join words together e.g. 'More juice', 'Mummy home'	Keep naming objects and modelling short phrases in the moment. When they hold up a cup model, 'More juice please'.
Begins to understand simple instructions e.g. 'Get your boots'	Encourage the child to listen to and carry out simple instructions, if necessary, model what you want them to do first. Gradually reduce the model.
Lots of copying of sounds and words	Make your words and talking interesting by using an animated voice and single words, phrases and short sentences. Respond to any vocalisations the child makes as if they are real words. Give praise for good listening and talking.
Beginning to use the sounds <i>p, b, m, t, d</i> mainly at the beginning of words	Respond to what the child says NOT how clearly they say it. Don't correct unclear speech, just model back the word correctly so the last thing they hears is accurate, e.g. 'It's a car , great you have a car '.

24-36 months



What to look out for	How to help develop
Understand sentences containing two pieces of information e.g. 'Give the pencil to Zahida'	Talk about what you are doing during everyday activities. Keep sentences short and allow time to process what has been said. Involve them too, children like to help!
Begins to use objects imaginatively e.g. a box may be a space rocket	Provide a range of toys and materials for the child to play with and model how to use them. Show how objects can be used for other purposes.
Uses up to 300 words and joins them together in phrases or short sentences	Keep naming objects, actions and modelling short phrases in the moment. When they say 'kick ball' you say, 'You're kicking the red ball'.
Understands 'who', 'what' and 'where' questions	Talk about what others are doing and then ask simple questions, 'Jamie is eating an apple in the snack room', here is Jamie? Who is eating an apple? What did Jamie eat? REMEMBER don't ask too many questions we recommend making sure that for every question you ask balance that with 4 comments.
Enjoys sharing books and listening to short stories	Make it fun! Use different voices and facial expressions to hold interest. Puppets can help. Keep them with you for as long as is comfortable, don't make them sit and listen
Plays with more children and starts to share	Model the act of sharing. Support children in parallel play.
Uses a wider range of speech sounds, should be using, <i>m, n, p, b, t, d, k, g, w, l, y, h</i> . Other sounds remain immature	Don't make children anxious about their talking by picking up on errors. Respond to <i>what</i> is said NOT the clarity. Don't correct unclear speech, just model back the word correctly so the last thing they hear is accurate e.g. 'It's a car . Great you have a car '.

36-48 months



What to look out for	How to help develop
Enjoys imaginative play, dressing up and representational toys e.g. Playmobile.	Provide a dressing up box. Keep using everyday objects and show how they can be used for different purposes. Join them in their play, extend their ideas, make it fun!
Understand sentences containing three pieces of information e.g. 'Give the orange pencil to Zahida'.	Have special time every day. Share books together and play with the child's interests. Comment on what they are doing. Wait and listen and model back what they say. Talk to them about what they did yesterday or hope to do tomorrow. Make talking fun! Keep modelling to provide a slightly extended example e.g. When child says 'Kitty go kitchen now' you say, 'Yes, Kitty is going to the kitchen to get some juice'.
Uses 3-4 word sentences and is able to link sentences together. Grammar is developing but irregular past tense and plurals are still Grammar is immature e.g. 'I dranked the milk' and 'I seed the mouses'.	
Beginning to understand simple 'why' question e.g. 'Why is Eimer going home?'. Emotions impact on this so when upset the child is unlikely to know why they behaved in a certain way.	Lots of children find it hard to answer why questions, however an understanding of these type of questions should be beginning to develop. REMEMBER don't ask too many questions. We recommend making sure that for every question you ask balance that with 4 comments.
Understands some describing words e.g. size (big, small), colour (primary colours), number (1-5).	Play with objects of different sizes and colours e.g. bricks, dough. Name the size, colour or number. Count steps or stairs, comment on different coloured cars seen when walking etc.
Begins to play co-operatively with others.	Comment on the child's play, let them take the lead and develop it with you and other children.
Sound system developing and includes, m, n, p, b, t, d, k, g, f, s, sh, w, l, y, h. They may not yet be using 'ch','th','j','r' and consonant blends e.g.'st, sk, br, pl etc.	As before DON'T CORRECT but model back the sounds in the word e.g. 'It's a car , great you have a car '. DON'T make the child repeat it after you. Refer to Speech and language Therapy if they cannot be understood by people outside the setting or home.

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