

Speech-Language Development

Developmental Milestone **What 90% of children are able to do at a certain age.**

Average **What 50% of children are able to do at a certain age.**

Age 18 months: **10 words (milestone) / 50 words (average)**

Age 24 months: **50 words (milestone) / 200-300 words (average)**

Age 35 months: **250 words (milestone) / over 1,000 words (average)**

Child Development Institute (www.childdevelopmentinfo.com); Nicolosi, Harryman, & Kresheck (2006); and Owens (1996)

It is often difficult for parents to know when to request a speech-language evaluation. If a parent is at the point of feeling concern, then the best advice is to ask a professional. One of the reasons for this is that there can be nuances in speech development and looking at the information presented online may not provide accurate guidance. A speech-language pathologist is trained to look past the basic developmental milestone information that your pediatrician uses as a screening tool. Number of words can be misleading. Consider the following information:

A child may meet the developmental milestone for number of words, however, the low range would place the child well below the average in comparison to his peers. Meeting the **milestone** does not mean there is not a speech-language disorder. Parents should note rate of progress and be aware of how their child is learning language in addition to counting number of words. Is the child learning to label objects? Can the child make requests? Is the child developing verbs and using action words? Is the child learning pronouns? A speech-

language pathologist will assess development of skills your child needs to be an effective communicator.

Consider the following information regarding number of words expected to meet milestones versus average. Notice the increase. A child with 10 words at 18 months meets the developmental milestone for his age and when compared to the average of his peers (50 words) would not necessarily cause concern, however, a difference of hundreds of words for the same child meeting the milestone for age three would be noted as a significant difference (250 words versus an average peer with over 1,000). Sentence structure and vocabulary of a child who just meets the 250 word milestone at age 3 will be significantly different than his average peer who has 1,000 words and the other 50% of his peers with well over 1,000 words in their repertoire. The gap in speech delay can very quickly become significant. Taking a “wait and see” approach may result in a larger delay and require longer to close the gap with therapy.

Speech-language pathologists evaluate a child’s speech-language development and consider areas and red flags for difficulty with learning and developing language skills that would allow the child to grow to be a successful communicator. Often these “red flags” are evident well before the child begins school. If you have doubts, seek a professional consult or evaluation. It is never as easy to address delays as it is in the early years because language expectations change and increase so rapidly as the child grows. Within a period of 17 months the average child goes from 50 to over 1,000 words!

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Age 35 months: 250 words (milestone) / over 1,000 words (average)

What else will a speech-language pathologist consider when evaluating the child?

Are they combining words?

Is their language increasing in complexity at the expected rate?

Are they asking questions?

Is their language flexible and creative?

Can they understand what is being said?

What kind of words are they using? (nouns, pronouns, prepositions, verbs...)

Can they participate in conversation?

Is there atypical language present?

Language expectations grow very rapidly in the early years. Children are language learners and a speech-language pathologist can ensure that your child will develop speech-language skills so they can share their thoughts. We are here to help and answer questions. Call today to set up a free consult: 815-304-5548.