

Areas of Language Development

Pre-linguistic/Play Skills

Pre-linguistic and play skills refer to how your child attends to and interacts with objects and people. These skills are important to facilitate your child's language development as well as his or her cognitive skills. Some areas that may be targeted during therapy to improve your child's play include:

- engaging in appropriate play
- taking turns with others
- demonstrating cause and effect (e.g., pushing a button to cause a door on a toy to open)
- performing pretend play
- showing problem-solving skills (e.g., placing nesting blocks inside of each other in the correct order)

Expressive Language

Expressive language refers to what your child says (or communicates through an alternative means). Components of language that may be assessed or targeted during therapy as expressive language include:

- semantics (word meanings or vocabulary, such as labels for objects, action words, and pronouns)
- morphology (units of meaning, such as plurals, verb endings, and possessives)
- syntax (sentence structure, which is word order, and use of different types of sentences)

Obviously, as children are first beginning to talk, they are not expected to use sentences. However, by the time a child is three years old, it is expected that he or she should be talking in sentences. In addition to the words and word combinations your child says is a component of language known as *pragmatics*. Pragmatics is how your child uses language (e.g., for requesting objects, actions, and information; answering questions; refusing; teasing; clarifying; continuing topics of conversation).

Receptive Language

Receptive language is what your child understands. Some skills that demonstrate what your child understands include:

- responding to verbalizations
- identifying body parts
- pointing to pictures named in books
- following directions
- showing understanding of size and color concepts
- answering questions

A younger child is expected to understand less, but by three years of age, a child should be following three-step directions and answering *wh-* questions (e.g., *who, what, where*).

Developmental Language Delay

A developmental language delay may occur if your child's language skills are not developing at a similar rate as same-age peers. This delay may be in your child's expressive language, receptive language, or both. As seen in the *Speech and Language Developmental Milestones* chart on pages 152–154, skills generally develop in age ranges (e.g., 9 to 12 months) rather than precisely at 10 months of age.