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Are My Child's Language Skills Developing Normally?

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A very complicated and amazing foundation of language skills begins developing at birth. Children develop certain skills at different times as they move through the early stages of learning language. On the average, children learn to read by age seven, but learning to read is dependent upon their acquisition of a good foundation of skills.

The following list of milestones is the result of current research in the field where studies continue to analyze how and when children learn and begin to present certain language skills. As you look over this list, keep in mind that children vary greatly in how and when they develop and learn these skills. These skills do not follow a concrete order.

From birth to age 3, most babies and toddlers become able to:

- Make cooing, babbling sounds in the crib which gives way to enjoying rhyming and nonsense word games with a parent or caregiver.
- Play along in games such as "peek-a-boo" and "pat-a-cake."
- Respond to gestures and facial expressions.
- Associate words they hear frequently with what the words mean.
- Imitate the tones, rhythms, and sounds that adults use when talking.
- Handle objects such as board books and alphabet blocks in their play.
- Recognize certain books by their covers.
- Pretend to read books.
- Understand how to handle a book.
- Share books with an adult as a routine part of life.
- Name some objects in a book.
- Talk about characters in books.
- Look at pictures in books and realize they are symbols of real things.
- Listen attentively to stories.
- Begin paying attention to specific print such as the first letters of their names.
- Scribble with a purpose as if writing or drawing something.
- Produce letter-like forms and scribbles that resemble writing.
- Ask or demand that adults or others read or write with them.



From ages 3-4, most preschoolers become able to:

- Enjoy listening to and talking about storybooks.
- Understand that print carries a message.
- Make attempts to read and write.
- Identify familiar signs and labels.
- Participate in rhyming games.
- Identify some letters and make some letter-sound matches.
- Attempt writing letters to represent meaningful words like their name or phrases such as "I love you."

At age 5, most kindergartners become able to:

- Sound as if they are reading when they pretend to read.
- Enjoy someone reading to them.
- Retell simple stories.
- Use descriptive language to explain or to ask questions.
- Recognize letters and make letter-sound matches.
- Show familiarity with rhyming and beginning sounds.
- Understand that reading print goes left-to-right and top-to-bottom.
- Match spoken words with written ones.
- Write letters of the alphabet and some words they use and hear often.
- Write stories with some readable parts.



At age 6, most first-graders can:

- Read and retell familiar stories.
- Use a variety of ways to help themselves read and comprehend a story (rereading, predicting, asking questions, or using visual cues or pictures).
- Decide on their own to use reading and writing for different purposes.
- Read some things aloud with ease.
- Identify new words by using letter-sound matches, parts of words, and their understanding of the rest of a story or printed item.
- Identify an increasing number of words by sight.
- Sound out and represent major sounds in a word when trying to spell.
- Write about topics that mean a lot to them.
- Use some punctuation marks and capitalization.

If you have questions or concerns about your child's progress, talk with your child's doctor, teacher, or a speech-language pathologist. For children with any kind of disability or learning problem, the sooner they can get the special help they need, the easier it will be for them to learn.

"Remember that while babies aren't born book lovers, they are born learners. The more you read to them, the more they learn." Kate Jack – Parent & Child Magazine

Resources

Andrea DeBruin-Parecki, Kathryn Perkinson, Lance Ferderer. (January, 2000) *Literacy milestones from birth to age 6*. Retrieved September 2012. http://www.education.com/reference/article/Ref_Literacy_Milestones/

Reach Out and Read. *Developmental milestones of early literacy*. Retrieved September 2012. http://www.reachoutandread.org/FileRepository/RORmilestones_English.pdf

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