

Typical Speech and Language Development: A Checklist for School Nurses

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Preschoolers	Kindergarteners	Students in Grades 1 & 2	Students in Grades 3, 4 & 5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Comprehend approximately 1200 to 2000 words; <input type="checkbox"/> Can be understood about 80% (or more) of the time; <input type="checkbox"/> Produce short sentences (4-5 words) that often have grammar and/or word order errors; <input type="checkbox"/> Talk about the “here and now” (what they are seeing, hearing and feeling in the present); <input type="checkbox"/> Cannot accurately describe what happened during an event (e.g., a fall on the playscape); their descriptions have a story-like quality; <input type="checkbox"/> May resort to 1-2 word phrases when hurt or confused; <input type="checkbox"/> Produce rapid topic shifts in their conversations, making it difficult at times to follow their train of thought; <input type="checkbox"/> Interrupt frequently (or yell) to capture a turn in the conversation; <input type="checkbox"/> Enjoy “playing” with language (e.g., singing, rhyming, etc.); <input type="checkbox"/> Use language to take roles during play; use play to re-enact a troubling event (e.g., peer conflict, a bee sting). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Comprehend approximately 2500-2800 words; <input type="checkbox"/> Use about 1500 to 2000 words; <input type="checkbox"/> Can be understood about 90% (or more) of the time; <input type="checkbox"/> Engage in extended conversations using multi-word sentences (5 to 8 words); a few grammar errors persist (e.g., “<i>I breaked it.</i>”); <input type="checkbox"/> Can talk about what happened yesterday or what may occur tomorrow; <input type="checkbox"/> Can handle conversations involving two partners, but struggle with three-party interactions; <input type="checkbox"/> Relate simple stories about their personal experiences from the recent past (e.g., an illness); however, their stories lack detail and do not take into account the listener’s need for background information; <input type="checkbox"/> Use subtle and various ways of requesting (e.g., “<i>I just love orange juice.</i>”); <input type="checkbox"/> Use highly imaginative language and frequently take on the role of a fictional character during play. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Comprehend approximately 13,000 words; <input type="checkbox"/> Can be understood 95-100% of the time; <input type="checkbox"/> Use adult-like grammar and word order in their oral language; <input type="checkbox"/> Have learned the “rules” of conversational etiquette (e.g., “<i>Excuse me,</i>” etc.)’ <input type="checkbox"/> Can initiate and sustain conversations over multiple turns (5 or more) with two or more partners (e.g., recess or cooperative group exchanges); <input type="checkbox"/> Produce stories that “center” around a theme and contain a logical “chain” of events; <input type="checkbox"/> Become more explicit in their language when they perceive that the listener is not understanding; <input type="checkbox"/> Follow spoken and unspoken rules about communication and behavior in school, including when to talk, when not to talk and how to speak to adults vs. peers; <input type="checkbox"/> Use language to learn about the world (e.g., “<i>Why can I hear my voice when I put my hands over my ears?</i>”). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Comprehend approximately 20,000 to 40,000 words: <input type="checkbox"/> Formulate descriptions of events that are increasingly more precise; <input type="checkbox"/> Understand and produce simple figurative language, including similes, metaphors and idioms (e.g., “<i>It’s raining cats and dogs.</i>” “<i>She eats like a bird.</i>” “<i>We’ll play it by ear.</i>”); <input type="checkbox"/> Appreciate the humor in jokes that rely on words with multiple meanings; <input type="checkbox"/> Are conversationally competent; can use language to manipulate the behaviors, feelings and attitudes of other people; can transition from one topic to a related or new topic with ease; <input type="checkbox"/> Can adjust vocabulary and modify language style (e.g., the rate of speech or the complexity of the message) to accommodate listeners of varying ages, backgrounds and genders; <input type="checkbox"/> Can discuss abstract concepts and ideas that are not within their personal experience (e.g., how blood circulates through the chambers of the heart; what Eskimo children eat and how they travel to school, etc.).