**Common Receptive Language Milestones**

At ages 0–3 months, a child might smile in response to a friendly voice and turn toward a familiar voice.

At ages 3–6 months, a child might smile when spoken to, look to hear where a sound is coming from, and notice music, as well as toys that make sounds.

At ages 6–12 months, a child might respond by waving when someone says, “Bye”; respond to simple directions, such as, “Come here”; and look at pictures or objects when someone talks about them.

At ages 1–2 years, a child might point to some body parts when asked or get objects when asked, understand and answer simple questions, and point to pictures in story books when asked.

At ages 2–3 years, a child might follow simple directions, such as “Get your coat” and two-part directions, such as “Pick up your toy and put it in the box.”

At ages 3–4 years, a child might understand and answer *who, what, when, where,* and *why* questions, follow two- to three-step directions.

Sources: Children’s Learning Institute at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, pages 51–53; Texas Education Agency, pages 45–47; Texas Department of State Health Services; and National Institute of Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD) at the National Institute of Health

**Common Expressive Language Milestones**

At ages 0–6 months, a child might make sounds to express needs, begin to move his or her mouth when looking at a caregiver talking, and babble in a way that sounds like speech.

At ages 6–12 months, a child might begin to say real words and show a desire to communicate wants and needs, such as by waving arms, pointing, or using hand motions.

At ages 1–2 years, a child might say two-word phrases, such as “Go bye-bye” and ask two word-questions, such as “Where Mama?”

At ages 2–3 years, a child might say three- to four-word sentences, such as “Milk all gone,” and talk about events in the recent past. He or she might also name objects to ask for them.

At ages 3–4 years, a child might use sentences to express needs and speak about events using the past tense. A four-year-old might also ask a teacher for help solving a problem and use appropriate volume and intonation for different situations.

Sources: Children’s Learning Institute at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, pages 51–53; Texas Education Agency, pages 47–50, 52–57, 58–62, and 74–75; and National Institute of Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD) at the National Institute of Health

**Strategies That Support Receptive Language Development**

**Slow down**: Teachers can intentionally slow down their speech to help children understand them.

**Repeat**: Teachers can repeat important words, phrases, or sentences. This will give children more than one chance to hear and understand them. For example, teachers might repeat important words or sentences in a story. They might also repeat a direction, such as “Please put away the blocks.”

**Give cues**: Teachers can provide cues to help children with understanding. Teachers can use a real object or a picture of the object. They can also pick up, point to, turn toward, or look at objects as they speak about them. For example, they might point to or hold out blocks while asking a child, “Do you want to play with the blocks?”

**Simplify**: Teachers can simplify their speech if children do not understand them. They can use words and short phrases rather than complete sentences. For example, perhaps a child does not respond to the teacher’s question, “Do you want apple juice?” The teacher can simplify the question to “Apple juice?” and show the child the apple juice box.

When simplifying, teachers should keep in mind the goal of continuing to work on rich sentence development. This means that after breaking down (simplifying) language to help children understand, they should then build it back up. For example, if the child shows understanding and nods yes or reaches for the apple box, the teacher can respond in a complete sentence: “You *do* want apple juice!”

**Give short, simple directions**: Teachers can give children simple directions to follow. They should avoid giving too many instructions at once.

*The Texas Infant, Toddler, and Three-Year-Old Early Learning Guidelines* suggest that teachers give toddlers (children ages 18–36 months) some two-part directions. For example, a teacher might say, “Let’s sit down and have our snack.” They suggest teachers give three-year-olds some three-step directions. For example, a teacher might tell children, “It is time to put the blocks back in the bin, put the bin on the shelf, and sit on the carpet.” (Children’s Learning Institute at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, pp. 52–53)

**Break up directions**: If children have difficulty understanding multiple step instructions, teachers can break them up into parts. For example, a teacher might say, “Please put the blocks back in the bin.” After the children have completed that task, the teacher could then ask them to help put the bin on the shelf and, after the children have done so, ask them to sit on the carpet.

**Model following directions**: Teachers can complete an action while giving directions. For example, a teacher might put a block away as she says, “Please, put away the blocks.”

**Make following directions fun**: Teachers can be creative when giving children directions. Making directions fun will help engage children. For example, teachers might ask children to hop like a bunny and then growl like a lion.

**Ask for a response**: Teachers can ask older children questions that require verbal responses or ask them to repeat what they heard. For example, a suggested instructional strategy in the *Texas Prekindergarten Guidelines (Updated 2015)* is for teachers to “ask children who, what, where, and why questions” during a read-aloud (Texas Education Agency, page 46).

**Keep talking**: Teachers should look for opportunities to use language throughout the day. They can use any object or material in a classroom to enhance receptive language skills when an exchange with a child is interactive.

**Choose stories of appropriate length**: Teachers can choose stories that are a developmentally appropriate length for children. If stories are too long, children may lose interest or become distracted. Teachers can also split up longer stories into short sections and read them over a period of several days (The Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk).

**Use pauses**: Teachers can use long pauses when moving from one part of a read-aloud story to the next. This will help children who haven’t yet learned the meaning of transitions—such as *then, next,* or *last*—understand that the teacher is moving to a different part of the story.

**Engage children with stories**: Teachers should search for and use texts that require a variety of responses from children, including moving, singing along, or echoing what they hear. In addition to being a teaching tool, these activities can be used to assess children’s receptive language and understanding. Having one or two children at a time respond will show teachers if a child is not understanding what he or she hears and cannot respond appropriately.

**Strategies That Support Expressive Language Development**

**Add information and ask a question**: Teachers can add information and then ask a question in response to something a child has said. For example, if the child says, “Got block!” the teacher might respond with, “Yes, you got the block from the bin! What color is the block?” The child might respond, “Blue!”

**Narrate and ask questions about their own actions**: Teachers can narrate as they perform actions and ask children questions to encourage them to use expressive language. Teachers can talk and ask questions about what they themselves are doing, seeing, and hearing. They can also talk and ask questions about where they are going, what they are going to do, and what they have just done.

For example, a teacher might say, “I am going to build a tower. I see some big blocks I can use. I will put two blocks on top of two yellow ones. Which color blocks did I put on the yellow ones?” The child might respond, “Red blocks!” “That’s right!” the teacher might say. “I put two red ones. What is happening to my tower?” “Getting bigger!” the child might respond. “Yes, my tower is getting bigger and bigger, isn’t it!”

Teachers can also use narration to discuss and model appropriate expressive language behaviors. For example, a teacher might say, “Rose wants to tell me something. Watch my face while she is talking. I will look at her and pay careful attention to what she is saying. I will wait until she is finished talking before I respond.” (Texas Education Agency, p. 50).

**Narrate and ask questions about the child’s actions**: Teachers can also narrate and ask questions about what children are doing. For example, if a child is playing with a toy pony, the teacher might say, “You brushed the pony’s mane and tail. What is the pony doing now?” The child might respond, “Running!” and the teacher might say, “Yes, the pony is galloping fast, isn’t it?”

**Give children choices**:Teachers can ask children to make a choice. This will help the child to use words rather than using only gestures to communicate. For example, a teacher might say, “Would you rather play a game or read a book?”

**Play**:Teachers should play enjoyable games with children. They can introduce and use new words and phrases during the game and encourage children to use them, too.

**Name items**: Teachers can encourage children to name items with them when they play with toys, read books, or do other activities. For example, while reading aloud to toddlers, a teacher might point at a picture of a cat and say, “Here’s a cat. Can you say *cat?*”

**Read stories and ask questions**: Teachers can read stories often to allow children to hear language used appropriately. As teachers read, they can ask children questions about what is happening and why. This will encourage children to use the words and phrases in the story in their responses.

**Have children retell and reenact**: Teachers can give children puppets or props to use while acting out a story they just heard or a familiar story, such as a fairytale. Teachers can ask questions and use prompts to help children if they forget details during the retelling or reenactment.

Teachers can also extend a story by having children do activities in centers. For example, children can draw and talk about a story or plant seeds in a science center (Texas Education Agency, page 74).

**Write letters**: Teachers can have older children compose letters to friends, family members, or characters in a story. For example, teachers might write as children tell them what they want the letter to say. They might have older children write their name at the end.

**Sing**: Teachers can have children sing songs with them.

**Talk about a picture**: Teachers can talk with a child about a picture. Then the teacher can write next to the picture what the teacher and child said. With older children, a teacher could have a set of pictures or photographs, and the teacher and child could make up a story about them.

Teachers can also encourage children to talk about pictures they are drawing. Rather than say, “You drew a mouse!” they can ask questions, such as, “What is happening in your picture?” or “What is your mouse doing?”

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