

Seven Stages of Communication and Language Development - Summary

stage 1: (Birth to 3 months)

The infant communicates reflexively

- Cries, fusses, looks/moves away to protest, reject, show distress/displeasure
- Looks, smiles, makes vowel-like sounds to request action/object
- Looks, makes sounds, smiles, body movements, voice changes (loudness/pitch) to respond to/show awareness of and interest in others

stage 2: (3 to 8 months)

The infant is interested in others, but doesn't communicate intentionally

- cries, fusses, looks/moves away to protest, reject, show distress/ displeasure
- looks at what/whom she wanted, reaches, moves towards, makes a variety of consonant & vowel sounds to request action/object
- looks at person, makes sounds, smiles, body movements, changes loudness and pitch of voice to respond to/show awareness and interest in others
- makes sounds or performs action related to routine to request social play routines (eg: rocks back and forth to request "Row, Row Your Boat")
- looks, makes sounds, babbles (eg: "gagaga"), changes loudness and pitch of voice, smiles, body movements to call for attention

stage 3: (8 to 13 months)

The infant communicates intentionally and becomes very sociable

- cries/moans to direct or control another's behaviour/protest
- points/gestures to request action/object
- pantomimes to request social routine
- uses sounds that have special meaning and makes eye contact to call for attention, request comfort, show of, greet
- combination of pointing, looking and making sounds to establish joint attention/draw attention to object, people or event in the environment
- starts to use single words to label and request information

stage 4: (12 to 18 months)

Infant cracks the language code and uses her first words

- uses a small number of single words (10-20)
- one word may have different meanings in different contexts (eg: "mama" could be used to ask a question, comment or make a request)
- use of a word is often too broad or too narrow (e.g. "dog" may refer to any animal with four legs; "baba" may only refer to her own bottle and no one else's)
- begins to develop a receptive vocabulary -- words of familiar objects and people are used without giving cues (pointing) Communicates primarily for social reasons (as at Stage 3)
- perseveres if not responded to

stage 5: (18 to 24 months)

The child uses two-word sentences and language development takes off

- two-word sentences begin
- one sentence can have different meanings in different situations (eg: “Mommy car” could mean “That is Mommy's car”, “I want to go in your car Mommy”, or “We went in Mommy's car”)
- vocabulary undergoes a growth spurt (increases to about 200 words)
- negatives are used at the beginning of sentences (no/not)
- questions, questions and more questions are asked
- language is used to talk about more than the here-and-now
- understands many words out of context
- responds to a number of simple directions and questions
- starts to have brief conversations (provides new information about a topic you introduced or will ask a question about what you have said)

stage 6: (24 to 36 months)

The child uses three-word, four-word, five-word sentences ...

- Three word sentences develop and sentence length continues to increase .
- Sentences become more grammatically correct
 - prepositions (in/on)
 - ing being added to action words
 - “helping” verbs (can, will, am, are, is) are used after 2 1/2 years)
 - plurals
 - articles (the/a) appear
 - pronouns when talking about ones self (me/I)
 - negatives include “can't”, “don't”
 - conjunctions (and) use to list two things together
- begin to ask “why”
- becomes a story teller
- understands many different concepts
- follows two-part directions
- follows simple stories in books
- conversations go on for longer, taking more turns
- knows that a pause in the conversation is a signal for the child to take their turn

stage 7: (3 to 5 years)

The child uses long, complex sentences and can hold conversations

- links two ideas together in a complex sentence
- pronouns (I, you, he, she, we, they)
- questions sound more like adults' questions
- “is”, “can”, “do” & “will” used in questions
- negatives (3 1/2 - doesn't/isn't; 4 - nobody/no one, none, nothing as well as past tense)
- vocabulary approaching 5000 words
- language has become a tool for thinking, learning imagining -directs others with language
- appears to understand everything
- conversations continue for longer and child can hold their own -- understands the rules
- stories (narratives become a regular part of the child's conversation)

Adapted from Learning Language and Loving It, Elaine Weitzman, 1992