

Understanding Language

What to expect and when

Age Range	Stage	Examples of what the child may be doing and suggestions of what to do
0—12 months	<p><i>BEFORE understanding words:</i> Many children appear to understand what is being said to them at an early age but are actually responding to non-verbal cues such as:</p> <p>Sensory cues: smell, touch, sight, hearing; Contextual clues: Routines and following others.</p>	<p>An example of a child using some of these cues may be: Mum tells John 'It's lunch time – sit up at the table now please' John sits up at the table. So, does he understand the words mum said or..... Can he smell the lunch? Can he see that the table is set? Is it lunchtime? Are others going to the table? Did mum point at the table as she spoke?</p> <p><i>What you can do...</i> Label items and actions using 1 word at a time e.g. "ball" when holding the ball, or "water" when washing hands.</p>
12—18 months	<p>Understands gestures beginning to follow simple instructions. Responds to own name and some familiar names</p>	<p>Children this age will follow instructions like 'point to your <u>nose</u>' or 'show me the <u>ball</u>'. These are basic 1 key word level instructions—they require children to listen and retain one word to carry out the instruction effectively.</p> <p><i>What you can do...</i> Use your child's name before saying instructions to gain their attention. Continue labelling items and actions.</p>
18—24 months	<p>Understands single words. Hands familiar objects and pictures on request. Points to up to 5 body parts correctly on request. Carries out simple 2 key word level instructions.</p>	<p>Can follow slightly longer instructions of the type 'give <u>dolly</u> a <u>drink</u>'. This is where the child listens and retains 2 words in order to carry out the instruction effectively, when there are alternatives for both the underlined words.</p> <p><i>What you can do...</i> If your child finds these instructions difficult, show them what to do.</p>

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2 years	<p>Understands more 2 key word instructions. Understands objects by their function. Beginning to understand some basic concepts, and question words. Enjoys and follows simple, familiar short stories.</p>	<p>e.g. 'give the <u>cup</u> to <u>teddy</u>.' e.g. 'which one do you eat / drink?'. such as 'more' such as 'what?' and 'who?'. <i>What you can do...</i> Label concept words e.g. colours and sizes of objects. Whenever your child uses a word/phrase, add another word e.g. child says "big car", you say "big <u>red</u> car".</p>
3 - 3 ½ years	<p>Understands a wide range of 2 key word phrases. Begin to understand 3 key word level.</p>	<p>e.g. 'put <u>cup</u> in <u>teddy's</u> <u>box</u>'</p>
3½ - 4 years	<p>Develops concepts of colour. Develops concepts of size. Consistently follows instructions containing 3 or more key words that include concept words. Understands a more question words.</p>	<p>e.g. red, yellow e.g. big / little or small e.g. 'give <u>teddy</u> the <u>big</u> <u>plate</u>' such as 'where'</p>
4 years	<p>Develops more complex concepts. Understanding of 4 key word instructions is emerging.</p>	<p>Including place (e.g. under / by) time (e.g. later / yesterday) quantity (e.g. all, more, lots) abstracts (e.g. hot, happy). e.g. 'put the <u>apple</u> and <u>banana</u> in <u>teddy's</u> <u>box</u>' <i>What you can do...</i> Continue to label and show concept words e.g. placement words: 'you're sat on the chair'.</p>
School age	<p>Follows some consecutive commands. Understands a range of prepositions. Understands more abstract question words.</p>	<p>e.g. 'Tidy your room and then come to the table for dinner' Such as 'behind', 'between' Such as 'how', 'when' and 'why'.</p>