

Ontario's Preschool Speech and Language Program

Ontario's Preschool Speech and Language Program provides services to children from birth to the time they start school. Assessment and a range of treatment services are provided to children and their families across the province in many different communities, as close to home as possible.

If you have concerns about your child's speech and language skills you can get help from the Preschool Speech and Language Program. Program staff can teach you how to help your child's communication skills develop, to give him or her the best opportunity for healthy development.

Ontario's Preschool Speech and Language Program provides its services at no cost to you, and does not require a doctor's referral.

For information on local speech and language programs please visit ontario.ca/earlychildhood and click on Speech and Language.



Your preschool
child's speech
and language
development

Your preschool child is busy talking, exploring and playing. All of these activities are important for his or her growth and development – and for learning communication skills.

Your child will need well-developed communication skills when it's time to start going to school – to make friends, learn new things, and start learning to read and write. Communication skills are critical to your child's future success.

You play an important part in your child's ongoing communication development. Talking, listening and playing with your child will help to build the skills he or she needs to succeed in school and in life.

About one in 10 children needs help developing normal speech and language skills. Without help, it's a struggle to listen and talk, it's difficult to learn to read, and it's hard to play with other children.



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Publication # 019501

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Nov/2014 © Queen's Printer for Ontario

Developmental milestones

These developmental milestones show some of the skills that mark children's progress as they learn to communicate. If your child is not meeting one or more of these milestones, please contact your local Preschool Speech and Language Program.

By age 3

- understands "who", "what", "where" and "why" questions
- creates long sentences, using 5 or more words
- talks about past events – trip to grandparents' house, day at childcare
- tells simple stories
- shows affection for favourite playmates
- engages in multi-step pretend play – cooking a meal, repairing a car
- is understood by most people outside of the family, most of the time
- is aware of the function of print – in menus, lists, signs
- has a beginning interest in, and awareness of, rhyming

By age 4

- follows directions involving 3 or more steps – "First get some paper, then draw a picture, last give it to mom"
- uses adult-type grammar
- tells stories with a clear beginning, middle and end
- talks to try to solve problems with adults and other children
- demonstrates increasingly complex imaginative play
- is understood by strangers almost all of the time
- is able to generate simple rhymes – "cat-bat"
- matches some letters with their sounds – "letter T says 'tuh'"

By age 5

- follows group directions – "all the boys get a toy"
- understands directions involving "if...then" – "If you're wearing runners, *then* line up for gym"
- describes past, present and future events in detail
- seeks to please his/her friends
- shows increasing independence in friendships – may visit neighbour by him/herself
- uses almost all of the sounds of their language with few to no errors
- knows all the letters of the alphabet
- identifies the sounds at the beginning of some words – "Pop starts with the 'puh' sound"

Try some of these suggestions to help your child use words to solve problems, make choices, describe objects and events and share ideas.

Three-year-olds like it when you:

- Give them different materials to encourage drawing and scribbling, including chalk, pencils, crayons, markers, finger paints.
- Use descriptive words such as colours and opposites (hot/cold, big/little, fast/slow) as well as action words (flying, splashing, running) when you are talking with them
- Give them extra time to share their ideas.
- Give them choices – about what foods to eat, toys to play with, clothes to wear.
- Model correct sounds and grammar for them – child says "he wunned" and you say "yes, he ran".
- Read books that are predictable and repetitive – pause to give the child a chance to fill in the words and phrases.
- Play and pretend with them! They may like acting out scenes from their favourite videos, pretending to eat in a restaurant or to be a teacher or firefighter.

Four-year-olds like it when you:

- Give them lots of opportunities to play with other children – at the library, the park, the Early Years Centre. Sometimes they like having just one or two friends over to your home to play.
- Point out words in books and run your finger under words while you read to them.
- Talk about the order of events – describe what happens first, next and last – "*first* we wash our hands, *then* we have a snack and *last* we put our dishes in the sink".
- Encourage them to tell their own stories – by asking them to tell you about their day, to describe a movie they watched, to tell you about their favourite book.
- Read books with rhyming words – "mouse/house", and point out sounds at the start of words – "Mommy starts with the 'mmm' sound – that's the letter M".

Five-year-olds like it when you:

- Use new and more complex words – "before/after", "rough/smooth", "easy/difficult", "between/beside", "same/different".
- Talk about numbers and the quantity of objects – "a lot/a little", "more/less", "one/many".
- Ask them to predict what will happen next – "What do you think will happen when Sam opens his birthday present?", and explain the reasons behind choices – "Why do we need to wear our coats today?"
- Take turns telling each other stories using the pictures in books – children like to hear you talk and then want a turn to create their own version of the story.
- Let them help plan events. Talk about what you need to do before a birthday party, or how to get ready to go to the zoo. Ask your child "why" and "how" questions as you talk.
- Ask them to help. Your child will enjoy helping you prepare a meal, set the table, sort laundry, etc. Give them instructions and see if they can tell you the steps.

