

By two years, toddlers will usually:

- use over 50 single words like 'juice', 'car', 'biscuit'
- be starting to put short sentences together with two to three words, such as "more juice" or "bye-bye daddy"
- be asking simple questions such as "what that?", "who that?". They might do this quite a lot!
- understand between 200 and 500 words
- understand simple questions and instructions like "where's baby", "go and get your coat", "mummy's turn"
- enjoy pretend play with their toys, such as feeding dolly or pretending to drive a car, usually making noises and talking while playing
- become very frustrated when they cannot get their message across. This is one reason for toddler tantrums

Check out how the child can talk

Make sure you have time every day when you can have a 'conversation'.

- You should notice toddlers using more single words, putting two or maybe three words together. Encourage them to use short sentences this by using 2 -3 word sentences when you are talking to the toddler.
- Comment on what they are doing and they may talk about it. This works better than asking questions, E.g. Adult: "Ah, you've got a baby" Toddler: "Shh, baby sleeping" Or wait and respond to what they say.

Check out how the child can listen

Toddlers do not always do what we want them to, but on a good day you can note toddlers' understanding.

- Do they understand simple questions? E.g. When putting the toys away, do they follow "find me the bricks."
- If you are looking at picture books, can they point out familiar objects when you say? E.g. "Where's the dog?" or "What's the boy doing?"
- Can they play a simple game in your setting? E.g. Place some different toys on the floor with a big box to throw them all into.

Check out how the child can take part

Watch how toddlers play and how they react to others. Toddlers enjoy adults' company and might even let you join in with their games.

- Do they enjoy simple pretend games? E.g. With cars and trains, shopping and cooking?
- Do they also enjoy shape sorting games or simple jigsaws?
- Toddlers are not great at being directed by adults, but you can set up different activities. Try to follow their lead, E.g. Do toddlers begin to pretend to go shopping or cook dinner?

Some lovely things to do to encourage toddler talk:

- Share books together; interactive books with flaps and different textures are great – one or two toddlers sharing a book with you is ideal.
- Have times when you wait for toddlers to initiate talking – don't feel that you have to fill the silences.

- Repeat and expand on what children say. If a child says "car" you can say "mummy's car", "blue car" etc. This shows children how words can be put together.
- Playing with children, follow their lead and building their language and thinking helps them learn and grow – young

children really benefit from this approach.

- Finger rhymes and action songs help toddlers with the rhythms of language and makes talking and listening fun.

By three years, children will usually:

- use up to 300 words. They will use different types of words to do different things, E.g. to describe what things look like
 - 'big', 'soft'
 - where they are – 'under', 'on'
 - what they are for – 'eating', 'playing'
 - that say who they are – 'me'
 - to describe how many – 'lots'
- refer to something that has happened in the past
- put 4 or 5 words together to make short sentences, such as "me want more juice", "him want his coat"
- ask lots of questions
- have clearer speech, although they will still have some immaturities such as 'pider' instead of 'spider'. They often have problems saying more difficult sounds like 'sh', 'ch', 'th' and 'r'. However, people who know them can mostly understand them
- listen to and remember simple stories with pictures
- understand longer instructions, such as "put on your coat and get your bag" or "where's mummy's coat?"
- understand simple 'who', 'what' and 'where' questions
- play more with other children and join in with play
- play more complex imaginative games
- be able to have a proper conversation, though they may flit around the topic a bit and be difficult to follow at times
- be able to recognise how other people feel and will try to do something about it, E.g. "Ah, Josie sad. She need a hug."

Check out how the child can talk

Spend some individual time with children and listen to what they are saying.

- Are they speaking in sentences, joining 4 or 5 words together?
E.g. "Me a big girl now"
- Have they stopped relying on pointing or only using single words to get what they want?
- You should also be able to understand most of what they say at this age, though their speech might not be perfectly clear to everyone.

Check out how the child can listen

Three year olds understand a lot more of what is being said now. Check it out.

- Can they remember longer instructions and information?
E.g. "Teddy is in the box", "find a big plate."
- Can they understand questions using 'what', 'who' and 'where'? (though not 'why') E.g. When out walking or looking at a book can they respond to "What is that?", "Where is Spot now?"
- Three year olds should be able to understand these things by listening to adults talking without being shown.

Check out how the child can take part

Three year olds often enjoy the company of adults and of other children.

- They will watch other children playing and when they feel comfortable will join in.
- They might ask you to play with them and join in simple games.
- Check out 3 three year olds in your care. They should enjoy playing and talking with others.

Some lovely things to do to encourage toddler talk:

- Add words to children's sentences to show how words fit together. For example, if a child says "brush dolly hair" you can say "Lucy is brushing dolly's hair. Lovely".
- Share books and talk about the story and characters. Have children join in with stories to make them more interactive, E.g. joining in with repetitive lines of stories.
- If children say words that are not clear, the best way to help is to repeat what they have said using the right words and sounds. There is no need to make them say it.
- Songs and rhymes are good to use at this age as they help children to learn the patterns of speech and language, important skills when learning to read.
- Have conversations about real things with children. Let them start the conversation, listen carefully to what they say and follow their interests.
- Keep the talk going by, nodding, smiling, encouraging them to tell more through comments "really..." "wow..." "a spiderman outfit...", rather than asking questions.

By four years, children will usually:

- ask lots of questions using words like 'what', 'where' and 'why'
- be able to answer questions about 'why' something has happened
- use longer sentences and link sentences together, E.g. "I had pizza for tea **and** then I played in the garden"
- describe events that have already happened, E.g. "We got dressed up and we went to the hall and singed songs. All the mummies and daddies did watch"
- have mostly clear speech, though will continue to have difficulties with a small number of sounds – for example 'r' – as in 'rabbit', 'l' – as in 'letter', 'th' as in 'thumb', 'sh' as in 'show', and 'j' as in 'jam'
- listen to longer stories and answer questions about a story they have just heard, for example, simple questions such as "Who did Cinderella dance with at the ball?", "Were Cinderella's sisters kind?"
- understand and often use colour, number and time related words, for example, 'red' car, 'three' fingers
- enjoy make-believe play
- start to like simple jokes – though often their own jokes make little sense
- start to be able to plan games with others

Check out how the child can talk

By four years, children can explain their ideas and talk in sentences and talk about things that have happened.

- Can they explain where they went and what happened? E.g. The child says "Julie and Saria and me goed park and played on swings."
- Can they use longer sentences joined up with words like 'because', 'or', and 'and'? E.g. "I like ice cream because it makes my tongue shiver."
- Are they easily understood by others?

Check out how the child can listen

Four year olds are getting good at understanding more and more of what people are saying.

- Check this out by asking them to do a simple task as part of everyday activities.
- Are they able to follow simple two part instructions reasonably well? E.g. "Go and get me the big scissors and some blue paper from the drawer."
- Are they able to understand simple 'why' questions?
- Talk about a story you have just read and ask a couple of questions.

Check out how the child can take part

Four year olds use talk in different ways.

- Do they use talk to organise themselves and their play? You might hear them saying things like "let's pretend we are in a jungle, you be the... and I the..."
- They like make-believe play and dressing up.
- What about the four year olds in your care? Do they like to play and talk with others? Do they enjoy make-believe play?

Some lovely things to do to encourage child talk:

- Join children in pretend play. Play alongside them, let them take the lead. Listen and talk about what they are saying and doing rather than asking lots of questions.
- Give longer instructions for them to follow.
- Play around with words and sounds, E.g. think of words that begin with the same sound.
- Get the child to think of words that belong to the same category, for example as many different animals as they can think of.
- Make up a story together – think of a character, where does he live, where did he go today, what did he do, are there any mishaps, and what happens in the end.