



# Language Development Timeline (0-5 years old)

A resource guide on linguistic development in young hearing, deaf, and hard-of-hearing children

## Sign Language

## Spoken Language

### 3-5 Years

### 2-3 Years

### 1-2 Years

### 0-1 Years

- Asks and understands questions, like "where", "how", & "why" [1]
- Uses simple sentences, followed by more complex sentences [2, 3]
- Maintains visual attention, utilizes appropriate interruptions, turn taking, and gaze shifting [4]

- Uses more than 250 signs [5]
- Uses negation words, like "no", "none", & "not-want" [5]
- Uses fingerspelling [6, 7]
- Expresses emotions, like "happy", "sad", "mad" [1]

- Uses more than 50 signs [13]
- Use pointing [1, 8, 9, 10]
- Use 2-sign combinations [11]

- Begins sign babbling around 6 months [11, 12]
- First meaningful sign appears around 1 year [1, 11]

- Asks and understands questions, like "where", "how", & "why" [14, 15, 17]
- Uses simple sentences, followed by more complex sentences [14, 15, 17]
- Maintains attention, engages in conversation utilizing appropriate interruptions and turn taking [14, 15, 16, 17]

- Uses more than 200-300 words [17]
- Uses negation words, like "no", "not", "can't", & "don't" [17]
- Uses 2-3 words to talk about things [14, 16]
- Expresses emotions, like "happy", "sad", "mad" [17]

- Uses more than 50 words [16, 17]
- Use pointing [15, 17]
- Use 2-word combinations [14, 16]

- Begins vocal babbling around 6 months [14, 16, 17]
- First meaningful word appears around 1 year [14, 16, 17]

For a more extensive list of linguistic milestones for children acquiring a sign language, see the [Visual Communication and Sign Language Checklist for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children](#).

[1] Anderson, D., & Reilly, J. (2002). The MacArthur Communicative Development Inventory: Normative Data for American Sign Language. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, 7(2), 83–106. <https://doi.org/10.1093/deafed/Z2.83>; [2] Pichler, D. C. (2001). Word order variation and acquisition in American Sign Language (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT.; [3] Schick, B. M. (2002). The expression of grammatical relations in deaf toddlers learning ASL. In G. Morgan & B. Woll (Eds.), *Directions in sign language acquisition* (pp. 143–158). Amsterdam, The Netherlands: John Benjamins.; [4] Singleton, J. L., & Crume, P. (2010). Socializing visual engagement in early childhood deaf education. Presented at the International Congress of Education of the Deaf, Vancouver, BC, Canada; [5] Anderson, D. (2006). The development of American Sign Language and manually coded English systems. In B. Schick (Ed.), *Advances in the sign language development of deaf children* (pp. 135–160). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.; [6] Erting, C. J., Thumann-Prezioso, C., & Benedict, B. (2000). Bilingualism in a deaf family: Fingerspelling in early childhood. In P. E. Spencer, C. J.; [7] Padden, C. (2006). Learning to fingerspell twice: Young signing children's acquisition of fingerspelling. In M. Marschark, B. M. Schick, & P. E. Spencer (Eds.), *Advances in the sign language development of deaf children* (pp. 189–201). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.; [8] Falven, R. J., & Bonvillian, J. D. (1991). The transition from nonreferential to referential language in children acquiring American Sign Language. *Developmental Psychology*, 27(5), 806–816. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.27.5.806>; [9] Hoffmeister, R. (1978). Word order acquisition in ASL. Presented at the Third Annual Boston University Conference on Language Development, Boston, MA.; [10] Pizzuto, E. (1990). The early development of deixis in American Sign Language: What is the point? In V. Volterra & C. J. Erting (Eds.), *From Gesture to Language in Hearing and Deaf Children* (Vol. 27, pp. 142–152). Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer Berlin Heidelberg. Retrieved from [http://www.springerlink.com/index/10.1007/978-3-642-74859-2\\_12](http://www.springerlink.com/index/10.1007/978-3-642-74859-2_12); [11] Schick, B. M. (2010). The development of American Sign Language and manually coded English systems. In M. Marschark & P. E. Spencer (Eds.), *Oxford handbook of deaf studies* (pp. 229–240). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.; [12] Petitto, L. A., & Marentette, P. F. (1991). Babbling in the manual mode: evidence for the ontogeny of language. *Science* (New York, N.Y.), 251(5000), 1493–1496.; [13] Woll, B., & Morgan, G. (2012). Language impairments in the development of sign: Do they reside in a specific modality or are they modality-independent deficits? *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 15(01), 75–87. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1366728911000452>; [14] American Speech Language and Hearing Association (ASHA). (n.d.). How does your child hear and talk?. Retrieved from: <http://www.asha.org/public/speech/development/chart/> on 15 Dec. 2016; [15] Bowen, C. (1998). Ages and Stages Summary: Language Development 0-5 years. Retrieved from <http://www.speech-language-therapy.com/> on 15 Dec. 2016; [16] Johns Hopkins Medicine. (n.d.). Age-appropriate speech and language milestones. Retrieved from [http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/healthlibrary/conditions/pediatrics/age-appropriate\\_speech\\_and\\_language\\_milestones\\_20\\_p02170/](http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/healthlibrary/conditions/pediatrics/age-appropriate_speech_and_language_milestones_20_p02170/) on 15 Dec. 2016; [17] Sax, N. & Weston, E. (2007). Language development milestones. University of Alberta. Retrieved from <http://www.rehabmed.ualberta.ca/spa/phonology/milestones.pdf>

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