

MILESTONES OF SPEECH, LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT: 12 – 18 MONTHS

Growing from a baby to a child requires achieving many milestones in language, physical, social, emotional and intellectual development. Most children develop skills in roughly the same order but the actual age a child reaches that milestone can vary considerably. Our baby “Bill” has normal hearing.

The 12 -18 month period of development sees an increase in Bill’s language capabilities, possibly using 20 words by 18 months, and understanding 50. Bill’s social skills continue to develop, and he is starting to use more gesture and facial expression, as well as the beginnings of turn-taking during communication.

SPEECH AND AUDITORY AWARENESS: 12 - 18 MONTHS

Bill’s speech and listening skills are now becoming more integrated as he listens to others, learns new sounds and words, and is learning the meaning of non-speech sounds. In this period he is developing more speech sounds, and although some children may develop them a little later, many babies are attempting - **m n p b d w h**.

At 12 months Bill may be verbalising 1 or 2 meaningful words (e.g. “mama / dada”) and may babble while looking at a book. He will attempt to imitate and practice new sounds, vowels and words. By 18 months he may be using up to 10 to 20 meaningful words mixed with jargon (although many babies may not be using recognisable words yet) and may use them to request when pointing to an object.

Auditory memory is also developing and Bill is able to remember one item if he hears the word at the end of a sentence.

EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE AND SEMANTICS (CONTENT): 12 - 18 MONTHS

Bill is now using a combination of gesture and words/vocalisations to request things (e.g. pointing and asking for “more”). At this point the inventory of recognisable words is very small and it is likely that his understanding of words far exceeds his use of words. Bill may be able to imitate some words, but be unaware of their meaning. The mixture of verbalisation/vocalisation and gesture allows him to express emotions and communicate needs, wants and greetings.

Although Bill’s expressive language will be limited it is only part of a much bigger picture of communication which is developing. He is understanding more words, learning social skills such as turn-taking, will be developing prosodic features (intonation, rhythm) in speech, and using gesture and facial expression.

SOCIAL USE OF LANGUAGE (USE AND PRAGMATICS): 12 - 18 MONTHS

Bill will be starting to pick up, copy and develop social signals and behaviour which he will continue to use into adulthood. For instance, he may begin to shake his head for “no”. His interaction skills will be constantly developing and his interactions will increase in length and complexity. He will use more eye contact when communicating, turn taking in conversation (although this takes more time to develop properly), and using touch to direct others. Displeasure will often include gesture as well as verbalisation.

Bill will understand greetings and respond with vocalisation to his mother’s call. He will also learn the use of touch to direct others and begin to pull or push others to initiate games and involve others in play.

RECEPTIVE LANGUAGE (COMPREHENSION, PERCEIVING AND UNDERSTANDING) AND COGNITION: 12 - 18 MONTHS

Receptive understanding is now ahead of expressive language so Bill will understand more words than he can produce learning a new word every week. At 18 months some babies may understand up to 50 words and recognise many environmental sounds. Bill will also recognise objects and know what they are used for e.g. spoon for stirring or eating. Bill will start to be able to match identical objects.

Bill will look for objects removed from his line of vision, knowing that when an object is out of sight it does not mean that it ceases to exist. He will have learnt that some events are predictable and that an action causes a response e.g. flipping a light switch will turn on/off the light.

He will learn the names of his body parts and be able to point to them on request and his ability to recognise familiar phrases will increase (especially when accompanied with gesture), often picking out key words in the middle of the sentence.

GROSS AND FINE MOTOR SKILLS: 12 - 18 MONTHS

Bill begins to attempt to walk alone after first time using support or walking with one or both hands held. He will kneel unaided and at 18 months may begin to squat to play, stand and stoop to pick up a toy, and put arms and legs out for dressing.

Bill's fine motor skills are also developing and he will pick up a cup and spoon and take it to his mouth, pick up small crumbs, scribble with a crude grasp, point to pictures, and his mouthing of objects decreases. He will build a 2-block tower and be able to take the lid off a box to find objects.

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