

Communication Developmental Continuum

Neuro-typical Age			Learner Characteristics	Language Activities	Warning Signs / Things to Look Out For
6 months	Emerging Communicators	Expressive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Make sounds when you talk to them or to gain attention - Smiles and laughs when other people smile and laugh 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - get close, let them see your face - listen to them - Copy sounds made – do they look at you or join in, are they cooing and gurgling to themselves? - leave spaces in your talk for them to join in or start the ‘conversation’ - look at and talk about pictures or picture books 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do not watch faces with interest - Do not respond to loud noises
		Receptive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recognise voices - Turn towards sounds - Pays attention to faces - Startles with loud noise - Looks towards the location of a sound - Reaches for toys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Play social games such as “Peek a Boo.” - Talk about what is happening - Sing songs, focusing on face-to-face interaction. - Place cause and effect toys next to your child and activate the toy to work on head turning towards sounds or movement. <p style="text-align: center;">6-12 months Stoke Speaks Out</p>	
1 year		Expressive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Say 1–2 recognisable words - Enjoy peekaboo - Babble back in conversations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - spend time with individuals - Respond to gestures or sounds. Interpret what they are saying and model vocabulary. - play, interact and repeat (ready steady go) - use treasure baskets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do not smile back - Do not look at you when you talk - Do not try to gain attention
		Receptive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understand simple words, especially when they are familiar things and when a gesture is used) - Recognises familiar people - Likes to chew or pat books - Responds to name - Imitates simple actions - Responds to simple directions (such as “come here,” “sit down,” and “stand up”) - Gives blocks or toys requested 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - talk about everyday activities, e.g. eating, getting dressed - When you notice your child has looked away call his/her name to see if he looks back at you. If your child looks at you give lots of praise. - Use actions with words to help with understanding of words - Teach imitation through simple songs such as “Itsy Bitsy Spider,” and “Patty Cake.” - Have 3-4 familiar objects nearby and ask for one of them 	
18 months		Expressive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Point to show interest - Use up to 20 single words - Enjoy pretend play 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - use pretend phones to develop two-way conversations - model vocabulary, especially when it is new - share picture books and talk about pictures in short sentences - Play ready, steady go with bubbles, balls etc. (on their level) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do not respond to noises by 9 months - Do not understand what you say
		Receptive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understand simple instructions - Follows simple directions (such as put in/on) - Points at 2 or more named objects/pictures from a group - Points to 1 to 3 body parts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use toys such as shape sorters and practice putting shapes “in.” Make sure to say the word “in” each time your child puts a shape in the bin. - Teach your child to imitate you while you point to a body part in a playful manner. 	

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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Answers simple “where” questions such as “where’s the ball” or “where’s teddy?” - Answers “yes/no” questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Point to basic objects in a book or around your home and name them. Help them point with you. <p style="text-align: center;">12-24 months Stoke Speaks Out</p>	
2 years		Expressive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Say 50+ words - Use 2–3-word sentences - Ask simple questions - can become frustrated when they cannot get their point across - Object permanence is fully acquired 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Make time in every day for a conversation - comment on what they are doing - have times where adults wait for pupils to initiate talking - repeat and expand - Finger rhymes and action songs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aren’t babbling by 12–15 months - Not saying 25 recognisable words
		Receptive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Listens to simple stories, songs and rhymes for about 2-4 minutes - Points to named pictures in a book - Understands 200-500 words - understands simple questions and instructions - Points to 5 body parts on self or doll 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To increase attention span read short books and keep story time exciting by using a playful voice. - Talk in simple sentences. - ask them to point out familiar objects - Make sure to pick appropriate books such as “Ten Tiny Toes.” Read slowly and help your child point to pictures you name or describe in the book. 	
		Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enjoys pretend play - Does pretend play by relating (performing) action to objects (such as washes or feeds a doll). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - play – follow their lead - Use a baby doll or a toy car to teach pretend play. Show them how to give the baby the bottle or how to feed the bear. Model pushing toy cars and have your child imitate you. <p style="text-align: center;">2-3 years Stoke Speaks Out</p>	
3 years		Expressive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use 4–5-word sentences - Understand 300+ words - Ask lots of questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide your child with books which target action words such as “I Can Do That.” - add words to sentences to show how words fit together - share books and talk about the story and characters. Encourage interaction, particularly with repetitive lines - Sensitive correction of mispronounced words but without asking a child to repeat the word - listen to, say and sing songs and rhymes - have conversations about real things, especially about their interests - keep conversations going by nodding, smiling and encouraging them using words like “really...” “wow...” rather than asking questions. - To teach your child the concept of “under” practice by hiding toys under objects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cannot follow simple instructions - Speech is very unclear

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	Developing Communicators	Receptive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Begins to understand time concepts such as wait and later - Follows 2 step directions such as “get the ball and bring it here, please” - Points to named actions in pictures - Comprehends the concept of “same” and will choose identical objects from a group - Points to pictures of 10 objects described by their use (for example, point to you wear this on your foot) - Comprehends concepts of in, on, and under - Recognises family members based on the nouns used to describe them (for example, grandpa and brother) - Listens to stories for about 8-15 minutes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - You can encourage your child to sustain attention for just one more page when they start to lose interest. Make the last page FUN and keep it short. - Teach 2-step directions by giving instructions such as, “get the ball and give it to dad.” Keep it simple and keep it fun. - Play “Simon says” with two-part instructions - create and talk about family trees/books 	
		Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Join in with play - Begins to sequence related action in play (for example, preparing food for a doll, feeding it and wiping its mouth) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Choose several toys which will allow you to demonstrate a sequence or routine. For example, pretend to make food, then feed a doll and lastly, wipe the doll’s mouth. - To teach your child functions of objects by using familiar objects in play. For example, if you’re feeding a doll teach, “the spoon is for eating.” If you’re playing with a car teach, “the car is for driving.” <p style="color: blue; text-decoration: underline;">3-4 years Stoke Speaks Out</p>	
4 years		Expressive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Talk clearly - Use action and descriptive words - lists events with some details but not always in the right order - Tell short stories - asks questions – what, where - have mostly clear speech, though some will continue to have difficulties with some sounds, i.e. r in rabbit, l in letter, ‘th’ in thumb, ‘sh’ in show, ‘j’ in jam. - use colour, number and time related words - Uses well-formed sentences, but there may be some errors, e.g. I falled down - Uses words more specifically to make meaning clear, e.g. I saw a spider monkey - retells favourite stories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teach your child to use objects for other purposes such as using a banana for talking on the phone. - Encourage your child to retell a story or event and help him/her reenact it through play. - To help your child with comprehension of basic size vocabulary use toys of varying sizes and organize them by size. Talk about the toys that are big vs. little. - Teach qualitative concepts by describing how things feel. For example, “blanket is soft.” 	
	Receptive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understands the concepts of next to, beside and between - Understands simple questions about their own actions and environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teach “front” and “behind” by using toys. Place a ball in front of a bear while telling your child “The ball is in front of the bear.” 		

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Comprehends concepts of “in front of” and “behind” - Begins to reenact experienced events (for example, birthday parties or baking cookies) - Comprehends 1,500- 2,000 words - Follows directions to put toys away - Improves listening skills and begins to learn from listening - Comprehends basic qualitative concepts such as soft, hard, rough and smooth - Comprehends basic size vocabulary (i.e., big/ small) - Listen to longer stories and answer questions about a story they have just heard. - understand colour, number and time related words 		
	Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - takes part in individual and group conversations - Play cooperatively - Begins with symbolic play (using one object to represent another) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Play with one set of toys at a time and build a routine to clean up all toys before using a different set of toys. 	
5 years	Expressive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use long sentences - compares word – the way they sound - Talk about past/future - uses newly learnt words in a specific and appropriate way - speech is clear with occasional errors, especially consonant blends) - Asks questions to find out specific information, including how and why - Uses different ways to join phrases to help explain or justify an event - tell stories that set the scene, have a basic plot and a sequence of events - keeps to a topic but is easily prompted to move on if it takes over 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To help your child with identifying primary colours teach 1-2 colours at a time through repetitive labelling during play. For example, use blocks and build one blue tower & one green tower. - link new words to existing knowledge - explore how a word looks and how it feels - Intensive interaction naturally builds turn taking - To teach descriptive words, talk about how things look and feel. For example, the ball is round, the string is long and the box is heavy. - Pretend play by creating a classroom environment. Take turns being the teacher and giving directions. - Ask questions while reading stories and help your child answer the questions. For example: Who is playing? What are they doing? What’s the boy’s name? - ask them to summarise a recent task, activity or event using question prompts. - play quick thinking games – how many animals can you think of in 20 seconds? - give explicit structures for narrative skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Talk in jumbled sentences - Not joining words into sentences - missing words - jumbling up sounds - Do they follow others or often look confused
	Receptive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - starts to ignore unimportant information - is aware when a message is unclear and comments or asks for explanation - understands complex 2-to-3-part instructions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - give plenty of time for thinking and responding to questions - A farm with farm animals can be used to help with concepts of above/below and top/bottom. You can place the animals in 	

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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understand positional and time words - Follow multi-step instructions - Understands basic quantity concepts such as a lot, a little, empty and full. - Understands directions based on spatial concepts such as above, below, top, and bottom - Begins to understand time concepts yesterday, today and tomorrow. - Understands descriptive words such as heavy/light, loud/soft and long/short - Demonstrates improved comprehension of directions provided at home and at school - Points to primary colours: red, yellow, green and blue - Attends to short stories and answers simple questions about the stories 	<p>different locations and talk about it. For example, “the cow is on the bottom.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ask questions and support retrieval of key information - build up the length and complexity of instructions over time - Reflect on sessions / the day - which part have they enjoyed most - encourage pupils to ask questions – seeking clarification, saying when they don’t understand 	
		Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - uses and experiments with different styles of talking with different people - Demonstrates more imaginative play - Plays cooperatively and participates in turn taking games 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To aid your child with turn-taking games, take turns with him during play. For example, take turns blowing bubbles while saying “my turn” vs “your turn.” - provide opportunities to debate – negotiate, give opinions and discuss ideas and feelings 	
7 years	Skilled Communicators	Expressive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use complex sentences - Maintain conversations - uses a range of words relating to time and measurement - uses a wide range of verbs to express their thoughts, or about cause and effect - join in discussions about an activity using topic vocabulary - speech is clear, uses words with three sounds together or words with lots of syllables - uses regular and unusual word endings - uses complex grammar and sentences to clarify, summarise, explain and plan - stories have a good structure – distinct plot, exciting event, clear resolution and conclusion - use intonation to make storytelling and reports exciting and interesting - uses formal language when appropriate in some familiar situations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - have topic words on display and refer to them - play games with words to encourage pupils to use and learn words - use more complicated language to justify or explain, e.g. why is a familiar character good or bad? - Play word games – how many words can we find for the same thing - Have a box of connectives to encourage longer sentences - Use specific roles in discussions, e.g. encourager, questioner, timekeeper, leader, observer – model each of the roles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Struggle to make sense in conversation - struggle to understand and learn topic vocabulary - Use short or incorrect sentences - watch for pupils who take a long time to respond or watch other pupils to find out what to do. - Watch out for pupils that are

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - uses tone of voice, stress on words and gestures naturally to add meaning - Uses language for a full range of different reasons. 		isolated or do not take part in conversations
	Receptive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understand idioms and multiple meanings - Follow long instructions - Listens to key information and makes relevant, related comments - identifies clearly when they haven't understood - Able to infer meaning, reason and predict 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hot seating – asking specific questions to find out specific information - role play – talking to different people, e.g. adults, peers, professionals etc. - encourage the ethos of clarification 	
9 years	Expressive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Makes choices from a wide and varied vocabulary e.g. 'Leap' instead of 'jump' - Uses sophisticated words but the meaning might not always be accurate: e.g. "My bedroom was meticulous." - Knows that words can have two meanings and uses them appropriately. Can't always explain how they are linked: e.g. 'Hard' (rigid object and tough person). - Uses long and complex sentence structures - Uses questions to help conversations flow - Sentences average about 7 to 10 words - longer in stories than in conversation. - Knows when a sentence is not grammatically correct and can explain rules of grammar - Tells elaborate entertaining stories which are full of detailed descriptions. - Everyday language is detailed and not always about their immediate experience. - Incorporates a subplot in telling stories and recalling events, before resolving the main storyline. - Uses complex joining words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - opportunities to summarise and explain choices - discuss group visits or activities, giving pupils topic vocabulary to use. - word games – choose a word, say what they know about it and how it can be used - sentence checklists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - watch out for pupils that are slow to respond or rarely ask for clarification - watch for pupils that come across as rude or immature
	Receptive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sustains active listening to both what is said and the way it is said. - Follows longer instructions that are not familiar - Understands different question types - Understands simple jokes and simple idioms, but can't really explain why they are funny or what they mean 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - additional time to think and process - give pupils instructions that include vocabulary that they do not understand to encourage them to question and seek clarification - inference quizzes – today I need my umbrella, what do you know that I am not telling you? - ask pupils to summarise the most important points from a lesson, activity or task. 	
	Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Uses different language depending on where they are, who they are with and what they are doing - Communicates successfully; shares ideas and information, gives and receives advice, and offers and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - opportunities to talk to visitors and different audiences 	

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			takes notice of opinions. - Realises when people don't fully understand and tries to help them		
11 years	Proficient Communicators	Expressive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use advanced vocabulary, including learning specific topic related vocabulary - Make up detailed stories - uses more interesting vocabulary when prompted, e.g. immense instead of huge - use more objective and clearer definitions of words - uses a range of joining words in speech and writing - tells interesting, entertaining and original stories with a clear plot and often sub plots - explains the rules of a game or a sequence of events in a simple but accurate way - average length of spoken sentences = 7-11 words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - teach and support new vocabulary, linking words to what pupils already know - complete a fact file about a new word – what do pupils already know - support filling in gaps of understanding of words - play around with how a word looks, what it sounds like to add visual and auditory memory - match definitions to words as a part of games - display key vocabulary with clear definitions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Struggle with learning - Only follow part of instructions - Difficulty with word meanings - are pupils the last to follow instructions or directions - do pupils struggle to get going
		Receptive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understand abstract language - Keep up with conversations - can follow complex directions, e.g. get the rectangular box that's on the bottom shelf of the stationary cupboard - understands common, simple 'sayings' in context, e.g. I couldn't keep a straight face - Understands factual information. Still finds it harder to understand inferred information - starting to understand sarcasm when exaggerated - instruction words are hard to understand - understands some words have multiple means, e.g. bright - beginning to use 'dictionary type' instead of 'personal' definitions to explain words - understands jokes based on double meanings though isn't always able to explain them - is aware when someone doesn't understand and tries another way to get information across - moves from topic to topic quite often in conversations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - give opportunities to use spoken language, explaining experiments, talking about experiences, retelling stories - support filling in gaps of understanding of words - additional time for listening and responding to questions and instructions - 10 second rule - when giving instructions, ask pupils to summarise or say back what they need to do in their own words. - play words games: can pupils explain both meanings of multiple meaning words, e.g. pen, spring; can they think of 5 words for small etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - do they repeat what you're saying under their breath or quietly to themselves - do they look surprised when you ask them a question - do they never use subject specific words, choosing general words instead
		Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - adjusts the politeness of their language to who they are talking to - Changes the style of conversation to suit the situation and listener - negotiates with peers and others to resolve conflicts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ensure opportunities to talk to different audiences, even if it is just a greeting. - role play - encourage discussion during group work - encourage them to identify good listening skills in themselves and others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - do they start and give up with explanations

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - starting to get someone else’s point of view when discussing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - give roles when working in groups, particularly having an “observer” 	
By 14 years	Expressive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use slang appropriately - uses words in more and different ways, e.g. bright day, bright idea - Defines more difficult words and gives examples, e.g. justice - Talk in longer sentences; usually 7-12 words or more. - Join spoken and written sentences together using a range of joining words to explain more complicated ideas, such as ‘meanwhile’, ‘however’ or ‘except’. - Change topics well in conversations. - Use more subtle and witty humour. - uses spelling rules and patterns in words to get clues to understand word meanings, e.g. -able, -esque, un-, dis- - Uses more difficult and academic words when prompted in formal speaking and writing tasks - links sentences using more difficult joining words - produces well-planned, complex stories with complete sections and plenty of detail - gives clear and detailed explanations of rules, or breaks down steps in more complex sequences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - play word games: find words with different meanings and give definitions; give the definition of a subject specific word, give alternative meanings for slang terms, e.g. sweet - give opportunities to explain things in different contexts and subjects - play sentence joining games - create an “asking friendly” classroom – encourage pupils to seek clarification. Teachers make deliberate mistakes to promote this - give structures to scaffold and support the presentation of information (spoken and written) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tell muddled stories - use made up words, e.g. float top instead of life jacket - Struggle to join conversations - Take things literally - Have difficulty giving specific answers or explanations. - Have difficulty telling their ideas in the right order. - Are better at understanding individual instructions than group instructions.
		Receptive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - understands instructions which don’t follow the word order of the sentence, e.g. before you collect your instruments, complete the worksheet and file it in your folder - can build an argument to persuade and - Show some understanding of idioms, such as “put your money where your mouth is!”. respond to views different to own - separates fact from opinion when reading - makes inferences, working out information that isn’t explicitly written or spoken - understands less obvious sayings, e.g. you’re skating on thin ice - infers meaning, working out information that isn’t given directly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - jumbled instructions for sorting and following - play games: can pupils work out the meaning of phrases given, e.g. this is the end of a very long day

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -confident in noticing and understanding sarcasm with clues - still challenged by some instruction words - can confidently explain the meaning of subject words and words with multiple meanings 		<p>turn up the heating when they say, 'It's a bit chilly in here!').</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Find long and complicated instructions hard to understand. - Have trouble learning new words. - Take a long time to organise what they are going to say or write. - Take what others say literally (for example, they don't understand that someone could take longer than one minute if they say, "I'll be back in a minute"). - Have difficulty taking turns in conversations. - Talk to teachers and friends in the same way instead of adjusting their
	Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Join group conversations - understands and uses slang terms with peers; keeps up with the latest 'street talk' - can keep a topic of conversation going even if the person they are talking to finds this skill harder - fully understands the difference between talking with peers and speaking in the classroom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - group discussions and debates based on a specific topic, task, video clip - give group members specific roles in the group discussions 	

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				style of talking based on who they are talking to.
By age 18 years +	Expressive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use descriptive and persuasive language - Tell long, coherent stories - picks out themes in discussion and uses a range of arguments to persuade others - uses a good range of difficult words and phrases to describe - use more advanced connecting words to make complex sentences - can tell long and complex narratives ensuring the listener understands the thread of the story throughout - Average length of spoken sentences = 9-13 words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - word definition games - Talk about... sessions - alternative word games - character description competitions, how many words can each group use - class reports - teach new words and revise the meanings of previously taught words - play around with descriptive words, adding more to discussions in conversations - Introduce new phrases and expressions - Continue to teach new conjunctions - reflection on language – how could I have made my argument stronger 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Trouble organising speech - Difficulty learning new words - Take things literally
	Receptive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Confidently follows complex directions - Knows when and why they don't understand asks for help in a specific way, e.g. Can you explain that to me again? I got the beginning, but I don't understand the last step - more skilled in using a range of arguments to persuade others - Reads and understands a wide variety of topics - Fully understands sarcasm and is able to use it well - understands words that are used in questions in exams and the classroom – knowing what the words are asking them to do - able to stay on one topic of conversation for long periods and move sensibly from one topic to another - understands more subtle difference between similar words, e.g. severe, considerable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - opportunities to follow long and complex instructions - sarcastic phrases games 	
	Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - uses their language imaginatively for social interaction - takes part in group social interactions, knowing appropriate times to join in conversations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - group discussions and debates where each member has a different task/view: can pupils listen to all of the views and then summarise? 	

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		- able to switch easily between informal and formal styles of talking depending on the audience		
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Reference documents

[Ages and stages - Speech and Language UK: Changing young lives](#)

[Birthto5Matters-download.pdf](#)

Useful links

[Signs and symptoms - Speech and Language UK](#)

[Resource library for families - Speech and Language UK: Changing young lives](#)

[Useful links | Stoke Speaks Out](#)

[Staged Pathway.pdf - Google Drive](#)

[Sound development checklist.pdf - Google Drive](#)