

Is My 3-Year-Old Speaking Normally?

By Ernest Roebuck, CCC-SLP

During a child's third year, speech and language skills continue developing at a rapid rate. The child can understand just under 1000 words, and will use basic grammatical structures such as pronouns and possessives.

The child is also using short phrases and simple questions (more than tantrums) to communicate frustration or to seek information and attention. The child will also seek out friends to engage in more imaginative play.

The following are some key speech and language milestones that you can expect from a three-year-old child. Every child develops at a unique pace, though, and your own child may not have *all* of these skills.

If you're concerned that your child needs help meeting these milestones, make an appointment with a speech-language pathologist at WestField Speech Solutions to determine further action.

Hearing/Understanding

- Understands about 900 words, and can quickly learn new words
- Understands grammatical concepts such as prepositions (*up, under*), pronouns (*him, us*) and possessives (*my, your*)
- Understands opposites (*fast / slow*), words for basic categories (*foods, animals*) and functions (*drive, eat*), and can answer basic questions about them ("Can you find an animal?" "Which of these foods do you like?")
- Can answer simple WH-questions ("Where is the dog? What is he doing?")



- Follows simple two-step directions ("Pick up the ball and put it away")

Speaking

- Speaks in two- or three-word phrases, using approximately 500 words, including: Prepositions (*out, behind*), auxiliary verbs ("Sky is blue") and past tense verbs (*jumped*) – though sometimes incorrectly ("I *eated* a snack.")
- Begins asking simple yes/no questions, and "Why?"
- Speaks clearly 50-70% of the time, though will sometimes 'stutter' repetitively when excited ("It-it-it fast!") Sounds used correctly in words include m, p, b, h, y, k, g, f, t, d, and n.
- Starts talking about things that are not in view (*toys at day care, a friend*)

Social Language

- While side-by-side (parallel) play is more common at age two, the three-year-old seeks out and prefers interactive, imaginative play with peers.
- Will use eye contact with familiar people, and will often use it to show you things or get your attention.
- Will rely less on temper tantrums, and more on words to express frustration. Also seeks information, clarification and makes observations.

References

Hamaguchi, Patricia McAleer. 2010. Childhood Speech, Language & Listening Problems – 3rd Edition. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

"What should my child be able to do?" accessed December 15, 2020, <https://www.asha.org/public/speech/development/45/>

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