

# Is My 5-Year-Old Speaking Normally?

By Ernest Roebuck, CCC-SLP

**D**uring a child's fourth and fifth years, their speech and language skills continue developing at a rapid rate. They still understand more words than they actually use, but the ability to describe more abstract concepts is increasing. While there may still be some difficult speech sounds to master, most of what a child this age says is understandable. Socially, the five-year-old child enjoys talking with others, and is learning to adjust their speech as the situation requires.

The following are some key speech and language milestones that you can expect from a child between four and five years of age. Every child develops at a unique pace, though, and your own child may not have all of these skills until the very end of this age range.

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

- With an understanding of about 2500–2800 words, the child comprehends most of what is heard at home and school (including stories, conversations, and movies.)
- Understands “sequence” words, such as those describing time (*yesterday, today, tomorrow*) and order (such as *first, next, last*)
- Follows multi-step directions (such as “*Change into your raincoat, put on your boots, and get an umbrella.*”)
- Follows classroom instructions (such as “*Circle the picture of something that flies.*”)



## Speaking

- Uses about 1,500-2,000 words, including: Letters and numbers; common opposites; pronouns; verb tenses (past, present, future) and irregular nouns and verbs. Mistakes are still common, however (such as “He falled off the swing”)
- Speaks clearly 80-90% of the time, but may still make mistakes with more difficult sounds (such as *s, l, r, sh, ch, th, j, v, and z.*)
- Can use concrete items as prompts to make up short stories, or to describe how common items are used. Language also emerges for less concrete uses, such as connecting ideas, or recalling events.
- Can repeat themselves in response to “What did you say?” and can repeat sentences to 10-12 syllables long.

## Social Language

- Enjoys engaging in small talk or “chit chat”
- Can keep a conversation going with others their age.
- Starts to adjust their speech to the particular needs of a situation (such as using their “inside voice,” or shorter sentences with toddlers)

## 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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