

Is My 4-Year-Old Speaking Normally?

By Ernest Roebuck, CCC-SLP

During child's third and fourth years, speech and language skills continue developing at a rapid rate.

They have an easier time understanding less concrete concepts such as colors and shapes. Fully 70-80% of what a four-year-old says is understandable, though there will be some errors with their speech sounds and their grammar. The four-year-old also continues to develop social skills such as initiating conversations, and directing their remarks to specific people.

The following are some key speech and language milestones that you can expect from a child between three and four 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 1200 words, can follow a simple plot in a children's storybook.
- Understands grammatical concepts such as prepositions (*down, up, top, bottom*) and pronouns (*him, her, us, them.*)
- Understands words for basic colors and shapes, as well as the words used for relatives (*grandpa, cousin*) and negation (*wasn't, doesn't, isn't*)
- Responds when you call by name from another room



Speaking

- Uses about 800 words, including: Plurals (*trucks, books*); Pronouns (*me, you, we*); Contractions (*don't, can't*); Basic conjunctions (*but*) and present tense verbs (*"He runs."*)
- Uses an average of four words in a sentence, and four sentences at a time, with a few basic grammatical errors. Can talk about what happened during the day, and ask questions (often repetitively.)
- Speaks clearly 70-80% of the time, with less frequent stutters. Words will generally sound correct, but there will still be mistakes with the more difficult speech sounds (such as *s, l, r, j, v, and z.*) and consonant blends (*bl, fr, cr*)
- Starts using basic rhymes (*me, see*), and can use pictures to aid in telling simple stories.

Social Language

- Initiates conversations, uses eye contact more consistently while talking, and will direct comments or observations to particular people.
- Will engage in a single activity for 10-15 minutes on their own (generally involving motor-based play or building), but will also participate in activities with and imitate their peers.

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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