

# ASK A PROFESSOR PETRILLO!

Dear Professor Petrillo:

As a brand new mother with a 2 month old boy, I was wondering about early language development. In other words, when should I expect my baby to start making recognizable sounds and even words? Is there research out there that explains some sort of timeline for the development of talking in a young child? Please let me know, as I am curious about what I should be expecting from my little one.

Sincerely,

Brand New Mom  
Toledo, Ohio

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Dear Brand New Mom:

Actually, there is much research on your very question. Oral language (speaking and listening) is the root from which all other literacy develops, including reading and writing. It is a natural process which has certain characteristics as the child develops. Each of these attributes or “stages” is common to “normally” developing youngsters.

Children begin to learn about language very early on; some say right from birth. They learn cause and effect. For example, if they cry for some reason, they will usually find that someone gives them attention. There may not be any specific words, but they quickly understand that there is “meaning” in the sounds they make.

- As a few month go by, babies will expand their vocalization to specific sounds. In addition to crying, they may coo, babble, and generally become mentally aware of the people who surround them and their environment.
- Between 8 and 14 months, babies will begin to associate their very first words with people (da-da, ma-ma) and familiar objects (dolly, juice). Mom can reinforce this process by consistently repeating these first words numerous times for the little child.
- From 18 to 24 months the toddler will speak more often and string together first sentences. Mommy can help the toddler by helping the child put those first sentences together. The child is learning that one can get information about the world by talking, and talking helps one learn about the world.
- Between 2.5 and 3 years, sentences become more complex. The child may “pretend read” or repeat little phrases that are picked up from books. Book sharing should be a regular part of the parent’s literacy arsenal.
- Between 3.5 and 4 years, the child’s love of reading develops and many questions are asked. In addition, “imaginative language” is used.
- By the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> year, the child has developed a preference for certain books, has begun to recognize common words and has made a connection with the alphabet through singing or reciting. The child is well on the way to talking just like you and me.....well, almost.

Hope this helps you with your 2 month old baby. It won’t be long before he is 5 years old. So get to work and help develop those oral language skills. In a future article, we will discuss what to do if your child does not seem to fit into the sequence outlined above, and what affect that may have on later literacy skills. Thank you for your letter and good luck being a brand new mom.

Professor Petrillo, Department of Reading, College of Education, Rowan University