

2-Year-Old Speech & Language Milestones

A simple checklist and activity guide for ages 24 to 35 months

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Observe your child during familiar routines over several days. Check each milestone you notice and note the approximate age observed. Use the activities to find out what helps. This is an educational observation guide, not a diagnostic tool.

Understanding language Receptive communication

☐	Responds to familiar routine words or phrases, such as snack time or let's go.	Age observed: ____
☐	Answers a simple where question by looking, pointing, going to the item, or showing its location.	Age observed: ____
☐	Points to or finds familiar people, animals, or toys when they are named.	Age observed: ____
☐	Points to major body parts when asked, such as nose, hands, feet, or head.	Age observed: ____
☐	Finds familiar pictures or objects after hearing their names.	Age observed: ____
☐	Understands common action words, such as jump, run, throw, or sleep.	Age observed: ____
☐	Follows a familiar one-step direction without needing a gesture every time.	Age observed: ____
☐	Follows two-step related steps, such as "get your bottle and put it on the table"	Age observed: ____

Understanding language

A spoken answer is not required. Notice looking, pointing, choosing, and completing actions.

More skills to notice Across everyday routines

☐	Begins to follow two different steps in one direction, such as "put down the ball and clap your hands."	Age observed: ____
☐	Understands early location words, such as in and on.	Age observed: ____
☐	Begins to understand simple possessives, such as mine, yours, Mommy's, or the dog's.	Age observed: ____
☐	Identifies a familiar object based on its function, such as showing what we eat with or what we wear on our feet.	Age observed: ____
☐	Understands when family talks about a familiar person or object that is not currently visible.	Age observed: ____
☐	Listens to a short song, rhyme, book, or conversation for at least a brief period.	Age observed: ____

OBSERVE THE SUPPORT If your child responds after you point, demonstrate, repeat, or wait, record it. The support you used is useful information to determine what facilitates understanding.

What helped my child understand? Notes

Gestures, visuals, words,
repetition, or extra time

Language Expression and Speaking

Communication attempts shared through speech, gestures, signs, pictures, sounds, and AAC.

Words and messages Expressive communication

☐	Uses a sound, gesture, sign, or word to request, protest, greet, comment, or get attention.	Age observed: ____
☐	Uses recognizable names for familiar people, friends, pets, toys, foods, or favorite characters.	Age observed: ____
☐	Imitates or repeats sounds and words heard during play or conversation.	Age observed: ____
☐	Uses familiar words or word approximations consistently so caregivers know what they mean.	Age observed: ____
☐	Combines two ideas, such as "more juice", "daddy go", or "mommy help".	Age observed: ____
☐	Begins using two- or and three- word phrases frequently.	Age observed: ____
☐	Uses words or another communication mode to ask for help with a need or activity.	Age observed: ____

ABOUT WORD COUNTS A meaningful vocabulary item may be a word, word approximation, sign, picture, or other symbolic message used independently.

Language Expression and Speaking

Look for growing vocabulary, word-combinations, questions, greetings, and ways to communicate.

Growing language Later in the 2-year-old range

☐	Uses a question-like voice pattern or begins asking simple what or where questions.	Age observed: ____
☐	Uses social words or routines, such as hi, bye, please, or thank you.	Age observed: ____
☐	Begins using early pronouns, such as I, me, my, it, or mine.	Age observed: ____
☐	Begins using early location words, such as in, on, or by.	Age observed: ____
☐	Labels or talks about actions during play, routines, pictures, or books.	Age observed: ____
☐	Adds new words or messages over time instead of relying only on the same small set.	Age observed: ____
☐	Pairs words with gestures, facial expressions, or body language to make the message clearer.	Age observed: ____

A message I want to remember Words, signs, gestures, pictures, or AAC

New or intentional message

REMEMBER Communication may look different across people, places, languages, and routines. Notice patterns over time rather than expecting new skill every day.

Communication during play

Look beyond vocabulary. Notice how your child shares attention, takes turns, and uses communication for different purposes.

Play and social communication Engagement and participation

☐	Makes sounds for animals, vehicles, or actions during play.	Age observed: ____
☐	Comments or shows something to draw another person's attention to it.	Age observed: ____
☐	Uses real words or other messages together with gestures during an interaction.	Age observed: ____
☐	Takes a short conversational turn by responding, pausing, or waiting for the other person.	Age observed: ____
☐	Uses jargon and words during pretend play with animals, food, vehicles, dolls, or figures.	Age observed: ____
☐	Names or refers to familiar playmates and important people.	Age observed: ____
☐	Shows a clear preference, choice, refusal, or request without relying only on crying.	Age observed: ____
☐	Tries another way - such as pointing, showing, repeating, or changing the message - when misunderstood.	Age observed: ____
☐	Shows interest in songs, rhymes, repeated phrases, or familiar parts of books.	Age observed: ____
☐	Uses communication with more than one person or in more than one familiar setting.	Age observed: ____

What about speech clarity?

At age 2, many sounds are still developing. Your child may simplify words or be easier for familiar people to understand. A communication milestone can be present even when pronunciation is not yet adult-like.

NOTICE Write down a hard-to-understand message, what you think it meant, and whether a gesture or situation helped.

Everyday activities: understanding language

Keep practice playful and brief. Model the skill many times before expecting an independent response.

1. Head-Shoulders BODY PARTS + ACTION WORDS

Sing a familiar tune while pointing to body parts. Pause before you say the word and let your child look, point, move, or fill in the blank.

TRY SAYING "Touch your nose. Now stomp your feet. Hands up!"

2. Toy helper ONE- AND TWO-STEP DIRECTIONS

Use cleanup or setup time. Begin with one familiar action. When that is easy, join two related actions together.

TRY SAYING "Get the car and put it in the box."

3. Find it by function OBJECT MEANING

Place two or three familiar objects nearby. Describe what one object does instead of naming it. Let your child point to, touch, or bring it.

TRY SAYING "Show me what we drink from."

4. Where did it go? WHERE QUESTIONS + LOCATION WORDS

Hide a favorite toy in an easy place. Ask where it is, then model in or on while your child searches.

TRY SAYING "Where is Bear? Bear is in the basket!"

MAKE IT EASIER Use a gesture, show two choices, shorten the direction, or demonstrate the first time.

MAKE IT HARDER Wait before gesturing, add one new describing or location word, or combine two familiar steps.

Everyday activities: expressing messages

Create a reason to communicate, then pause. Accept the message and model a slightly richer version.

5. Choice and wait **REQUESTING + CHOOSING**

Hold up two wanted items. Name each one, then wait quietly. Accept a look, reach, point, sign, picture, sound, or word as choice.

TRY SAYING "Apple or cracker? ... Cracker. You want cracker."

6. Add one idea **WORD COMBINATIONS**

Repeat your child's message and add one useful idea. Do not require repetition; your model is the practice.

TRY SAYING Child: "Car." Adult: "Fast car" or "Go car."

7. Sound-and-action play **IMITATION + ACTION WORDS**

Use animals, vehicles, or figures. Pair a playful sound with one short action phrase and repeat it during the same action.

TRY SAYING "Beep-beep! Car goes. Stop car. Go car!"

8. Pause in a favorite book **NAMING + COMMENTING**

Use a familiar picture book. Pause at a favorite page and wait. Follow your child's interest, then label or expand what they notice.

TRY SAYING Child points. Adult: "Dog! Big dog running."

NOTICE - RESPOND - EXPAND Notice the message. Respond so your child knows it worked. Then add one small piece of information: another word, action, location, or feeling.

Simple strategies to use all day

Choose one or two strategies and use them consistently during interactions and routines.

Follow the lead. Talk about what your child is already looking at, touching, or doing.

Get connected. Move close enough to share the activity without demanding eye contact.

Model, then pause. Say a word or a short phrase and leave several quiet seconds for any response.

Expand the message. Repeat what your child communicated and add one new word or idea.

Use fewer questions. Balance questions with comments so interaction does not feel like a test.

Accept every mode. Respond to gestures, signs, pictures, AAC, sounds, and words as communication.

Repeat with purpose. Use the same useful words in play, meals, dressing, books, and outings.

Keep it enjoyable. Stop before either of you becomes frustrated. Connection first, practice second.

My plan for this week Keep it small and repeatable

One skill I will notice	
One routine I will use	
One phrase I will model	

My child's communication tracker

Record new or intentional messages. Include approximations, gestures, signs, pictures, AAC, and spoken words.

Date	Message	How	Where / what was happening

Examples for "How": word, word approximation, gesture, sign, picture, AAC, sound + gesture, or word combination.

My notes and next steps

Summarize what you notice and prepare questions for a pediatrician, audiologist, early-intervention provider, or speech-language pathologist.

My child's communication strengths	
Messages my child uses most often	
People or settings where communication is easiest	
Supports that help my child understand or respond	

Questions or patterns I want to remember Notes for a conversation

Questions, patterns, or examples	
---	--

Bring useful observations Messages • understanding • context

Bring examples your child uses independently, directions or questions they understand, supports that help, and situations connected with successful communication or frustration.

WHEN YOU HAVE A CONCERN Share your observations with your child's pediatrician or a speech-language pathologist. Ask about hearing if your child does not consistently respond to sounds or spoken language. Seek professional guidance promptly if your child loses communication skills they previously used.

This guide supports observation and everyday interaction. It does not diagnose a delay or disorder and does not replace individualized evaluation or treatment.