Oaklin Lane

FAMILY GUIDE

# Toddler words by age

How many words most toddlers say from 12 months to 3 years, what counts as a word, 8 ways to help at home, and when to ask for help.



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## The answer in one minute

By their second birthday, most toddlers say **at least 50 words** and are starting to put **two words together**, like "more milk." The range is wide: some 2-year-olds say a few hundred words. A toddler who has fewer than 50 words, or isn't combining any words, is worth a closer look.

**What counts as a word?** Any sound your child uses on purpose, the same way, for the same thing: "ba" for ball, "wawa" for water, "moo," "uh-oh," names, and signs like "more." If your family speaks two languages, count the words in both.

12 MONTHS TO 3 YEARS

## Words by age

### By 12 months

- **Understands:** their name and "no."
- **Says:** babbles, calls a parent "mama," "dada" or another special name.
- **Gestures:** waves bye-bye, lifts arms to be picked up.

### By 15 months

- **Understands:** looks at a familiar object when you name it.
- **Says:** tries 1 or 2 words besides "mama" or "dada," like "ba" for ball.
- **Gestures:** points to ask for something.

### By 18 months

- **Understands:** follows one-step directions without a gesture.
- **Says:** tries 3 or more words besides "mama" or "dada."
- **Gestures:** points to show you something interesting.

### By 2 years

- **Understands:** points to pictures in a book and to 2 body parts when you ask.
- **Says:** at least 2 words together, like "more milk." Most children say 50 or more words.

By 2½ years

- **Says:** about 50 words, 2 or more words with an action word (“doggie run”), and words like “I,” “me” or “we.”

By 3 years

- **Says:** has short back-and-forth conversations, asks “who,” “what,” “where” or “why,” and is understood by others most of the time.

Each age is when at least 3 out of 4 children have the skill (CDC, 2022), so most children get there sooner.

## My child’s word list

Write down every word you hear for one week. Most parents are surprised by the total, and it’s the most helpful thing to bring to a checkup or speech evaluation.

Week of: _____ Total words: _____ Two-word phrases: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

## Eight ways to help at home

1. **Get face to face** and follow your child’s lead.
2. **Talk about what they’re doing:** “You’re pushing the truck. Push!”
3. **Add one word:** “ball” becomes “big ball.”
4. **Pause and wait** 5 to 10 seconds so they have time to try.
5. **Offer choices:** “Apple or cracker?”
6. **Sing and leave out the last word:** “Twinkle, twinkle, little…”
7. **Read the toddler way:** point, name pictures, make animal sounds, repeat favorites.
8. **Comment more, quiz less,** and keep the TV off in the background.

## Ask your pediatrician if your child

- Isn’t pointing or waving by 12 months
- Doesn’t say any words besides “mama” or “dada” by 15 to 18 months
- Has fewer than 50 words at 2, or isn’t putting two words together
- Doesn’t follow simple directions or point to pictures by 2
- Is hard for others to understand most of the time by 3
- Has had lots of ear infections, or you wonder about hearing
- Loses words or skills they used to have (tell your doctor right away)

About 1 in 7 two-year-olds is a late talker. Many catch up, but no one can tell ahead of time which ones will, so checking early is the smart move. Children under 3 in Texas can also get a free evaluation through Early Childhood Intervention (ECI).

## Questions families ask

### Does being bilingual cause a speech delay?

No. Bilingual toddlers may have fewer words in each language, but their total across both is usually on track. Keep using the language you know best at home.

### Is it my fault my child is a late talker?

No. Research shows late talking is linked to things like family history and being born early, not to parenting.

## We're here when you're ready.

Questions about your child? Our therapists will give you a straight answer, no pressure.

**LAKE HIGHLANDS**
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**ROCKWALL**
(972) 771-5731

Start online at **oaklinlane.com/get-started** · Free tools at **oaklinlane.com/resources**



Based on the CDC's "Learn the Signs. Act Early." milestone checklists (2022), the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (Late Language Emergence; Learning Two Languages), Rescorla (1989), Zubrick et al. (2007) and the American Academy of Pediatrics. This guide is for education, not a diagnosis. © 2026 Oaklin Lane Pediatric Therapy.