<https://ican.org.uk/i-cans-talking-point/parents/ages-and-stages/>

**Children at 3 to 4 years will usually be actively learning language and asking many questions.**

**Children develop skills at different rates, but by 4 years usually children will:**

* Listen to longer stories and answer questions about a storybook they have just read
* Understand and often use colour, number and time related words, for example, 'red' car, 'three' fingers and 'yesterday / tomorrow'
* Start to be able to answer questions about ‘why’ something has happened, although this still might be at quite a basic level
* Use longer sentences and link sentences together
* Describe events that have already happened, even if their sentences aren’t exactly like adults’ e.g. 'we went park'
* Enjoy make-believe play
* Start to like simple jokes even if they don’t understand them
* Ask many questions using words like ‘what’ ‘where’ and ‘why’
* Still make mistakes with tense such as say 'runned' for ‘ran’ and 'swimmed' for ‘swam’
* Have difficulties with a small number of sounds – for example r, w, l, f, th, sh, ch and j
* Start to be able to plan games with others.

**How to Support Your Child**

There are lots of things you can do to encourage children at this stage:

* Have a special time to talk about the day. Talking about what has happened that day will help their memory skills. It will also help them to talk about things they cannot see and things that happened in the past which is an important skill for learning in school
* Wherever possible, use pictures, objects, puppets, acting, gestures and facial expressions. This will keep a child’s interest
* Talk about or play games involving opposites like 'on and off' or 'big and little'
* Join a child in pretend play. Let them take the lead. This will help their language and creativity. Talk about what they are saying and doing rather than asking lots of questions. Your commentary helps their language skills and shows you are listening and interested
* Reversing roles can be great fun for a child. Let them be the 'mummy' or the 'teacher'. This helps them to talk about new situations
* Play with and talk about sequences of coloured bricks or shapes, numbers and days of the week.

**Things to Look Out For**

By 3 and a half years old a child should be understood by people outside the family. If not, parents should seek advice from a speech and language therapist.

You should be concerned if:

* They are struggling to turn ideas into sentences
* The language they use is jumbled and difficult to understand
* They are unresponsive or slow to follow instructions.

**This is a guide to how children develop speech and language between 4 and 5 years. At this stage, they need to listen, understand more and share their ideas within the classroom. They will use their language skills to help them learn to read.**

Children develop skills at different rates but by 5 years usually children will:

* Understand spoken instructions without stopping what they are doing to look at the speaker
* Choose their own friends and play mates
* Take turns in much longer conversations
* Understand more complicated language such as ‘first’, ‘last’, ‘might’, ‘may be’, ‘above’ and ‘in between’
* Understand words that describe sequences such as “first we are going to the shop, next we will play in the park”
* Use sentences that are well formed. However, they may still have some difficulties with grammar. For example, saying 'sheeps' instead of 'sheep' or 'goed' instead of 'went'
* Think more about the meanings of words, such as describing the meaning of simple words or asking what a new word means
* Use most sounds effectively. However, they may have some difficulties with more difficult words such as 'scribble' or 'elephant'.

How to Support Your Child

There are lots of things you can do to encourage your child at this stage:

* Building relationships with your child's pre-school or school is very important. Find out what topics or songs they are learning. This can help you support new words and ideas your child is learning
* Playing board games that involve taking turns helps them to listen and concentrate for longer
* Encourage children to talk without being questioned. This can help them to talk more about their experiences. Open questions like 'what are you going to play with today?' encourage children to say more than 'yes' and 'no'. If they find it difficult to answer such open questions, give them choices, such as 'cars or animals?'
* Although children may know lots of different words it is important to introduce new words and phrases. This helps them to continue learning
* Having fun with words and rhymes can help children learn skills they need for reading and writing
* Children may need time to think before responding to questions and instructions. Give them time without answering for them or finishing their sentences.

Things to Look Out For

For some children, developing communication can be a very difficult process and they may need extra help. By 5 years you may see the following:

* Difficulty with abstract ideas such as size or time.
* Difficulty with complex sentences.
* Not having the right words to be able to say what they want.
* Difficulty organising ideas in order.
* Missing out some words. For example, saying 'playing ball' instead of 'the dog is playing with the ball’.
* Talking about lots of different topics in the same group of sentences.
* Not using the right sounds so that their speech is difficult to understand.