**The Six Stages of Communication and Language Development.**

These stages represent what can be expected in typically developing children. Children with language delays also follow this sequence but can stay longer at individual stages.

**Stage 1:** Discoverer (birth to 8 months)

**Stage 2:** Communicator (8-13 months)

**Stage 3:** First Words User (12-18 months)

**Stage 4:** Combiner (18-24 months)

**Stage 5:** Early Sentence User (2-3 years)

**Stage 6:** Later Sentence User (3-5 years)

**Stage 1 Discoverer**

**When discoverers have a language delay:**

A child with a significant language delay may be a discoverer. Children who stay at this stage longer than expected usually have associated delays in cognitive and motor development.

**Why discoverers communicate:**

Discoverers will display behaviour that can be interpreted as **-** protests, rejections, showing distress, interest in others, request objects.

This will typically become requests for social interactions, games attention.

**How discovers communicate**:

Reflexive responses to physical needs initially such as crying fussing, smiling, facial expressions, vowel like sounds.

Voice pitch may change.

Babbling – long strings of consonant vowel sounds – dadadadada…usually starts around 6-7 months.

**How discoverers interact**:

At first, discoverers will smile at smiling faces and make sounds in response.

Around four month, they may become interested in getting and maintaining your attention.

Will enjoy turn talking, peek-a-boo smiling, laughing.

Gradually becoming interested in toys.

**What does a discoverer understand:**

A discoverer understands non-verbal clues – facial expressions, gestures, intonation.

Will not understand what the words mean.

**Next steps:**

To move to the communicator stage which will involve communicating directly to adults, having a goal in mind and expecting a response.

Joint attention – they want to share their focus of attention with you with a view to you responding to them, showing you things, pointing to things….. However, they are also able to follow your focus opening up many language learning opportunities.

**Stage 2 Communicators**

**When communicators have a language delay:**

An older child with language delay may be a communicator.

They may find it hard to learn new words. Sometimes their ability to understand language (receptive) is more advanced than their ability to use (expressive).

**Why communicators communicate:**

To direct or control behaviour of others, protest or request objects, social routines, looking for attention/interaction/comfort, showing off an accomplishment.

May be establishing joint attention through sounds, gesture pointing – this is the early stages of learning to ask a question.

**How communicators communicate**:

Using conventional gestures – pointing, shaking head, waving.

From 9 months will combine gesture with eye gaze.

From 11 months pointing, making a sound and looking back and forth repeating a sound. May use a sound as though it was a word – guh – when wanting you to look at something.

Will be more determined to get a response – getting louder or throwing a ‘tantrum’.

Showing early signs of using intonation.

**How communicators interact:**

Mainly for social reasons, pointing to things of interest.

Sharing your line of vision when pointing, pointing to see if you are paying attention.

At this stage children will enjoy and require games which imitate sounds, go back and forth, using eye contact, actions, gestures e.g. row row row your boat.

**What communicators understand:**

Will not have developed a true understanding of words.

May appear to understand much of what is being said to them but and seem able to follow some direction, however, they will still be heavily relying on clues from you – gestures, intonation, context.

By 13 months, probably understands only a few names of people/things.

**Next Steps:**

Moving to first word users, relying less on the gestures, and sounds to get message across.

If specific difficulty with speech production, this may be with signs gesture and pictures.

**Stage 3 First Words User**

**When language delayed**

Older children with a delay may stay at this stage for longer than a typically developing child.

1. May be delayed in expressing but may be age appropriately understanding.
2. Or could be equally delayed in expressive and receptive.

If language delayed first word users will have difficulty expanding their vocabularies and moving from single words to word combinations.

If severe language delay likely to have difficulty saying the words at all.

**Why first word users communicate**:

Similar reasons as communicators – mainly around the here and now.

**How first word users communicate:**

Approximately 10- 50 word– generally people, objects, events of interest.

Can be simplified version of the word i.e bobo (bottle).

Can be one word with different meanings e.g. mama = mummy. The child might be noticing she has come in, asking for mummy to get something or asking a question e.g. is that mummy’s coat?

Words like ‘doggie’ may be all animals.

**How first word users interact:**

Like communicators but beginning to use single words instead of sounds and gestures.

They will persevere in getting message across, getting louder, repeating, finding another ways to get message across. This is known as ‘repair strategies’.

**What first word users understand:**

Beginning to understand familiar single words e.g. Names or objects without visual clue

**Next steps**

Becoming a combiner who will start to put two words together e.g. big doggie, more milk. This will begin when they know approximately 50 single words.

Will be beginning to take more turns in the conversations, particularly in the conversations that they initiate.

If speech is not the main form of communication, they will be beginning to use more than one picture to link ideas.

**Stage 4 Combiner**

**When language is delayed**:

You may recognise some older children with language delay as combiners using mainly single words and two word sentences.

These children will have difficulty being able to construct and produce longer and more complex sentences.

How children develop can be very varied due to receptive language.

Skilled adults are crucial in this stage to jeep conversations going linked to understanding of child’s ability in comprehension. Conversations may frequently break down by over questioning and lack of awareness of a child's verbal abilities.

**Why combiners communicate:**

This will be for similar reasons as communicators and still very much in the here and now

**How combiners communicate:**

Children are likely to have a vocabulary growth spurt from 50 – 200 words.

In this stage, children will be starting to use two word sentences.

Combiners can start to express negatives e.g. no mummy, no bye bye

Starting to ask yes/no questions through intonation e.g. where go? what dat? gamma go?

**How combiners interact**:

Combiners are beginning to take part in brief real life conversations

May be able to provide info about a topic you have introduced.

They may ask a question although responses to questions may be inconsistent.

**What combiners understand**:

Beginning to understand many words out of context e.g. without visual clue you may say ‘let’s get ready to go for a walk’ and child may point to pram.

Will follow a simple direction e.g. cuddle the baby, kiss mama, clap hands.

Point to pictures in books to show words they know.

Answer simple questions.

**Next steps:**

To become early sentence users who are combining more than two words

Moving towards using whole sentences and grammatically correct sentences. This can begin when approximately half of the child's utterances contain 2 words.

If speech not main method of communication, they may be combining two or more pictures to communicate

Again, increasing the number of turns they take in a conversation.

**Stage 5 Early Sentence User**

**When language is delayed:**

Older children with a language delay may also be early sentence users.

Likely to struggle to follow grammatical rules to create sentences resulting in sentences often being grammatically incomplete.

Children may struggle to express more complex events and describing events in the past or future.

May also find it difficult to take turns in conversation

**Why early sentence users communicate:**

Beginning to use language to find out meaning, and will be likey to ask ‘why?’ a lot.

Will ask why but will not be able to answer why questions.

They are beginning to sequence events to tell stories although this may be a little disjointed.

They are beginning to show imagination in language they use and to express thoughts and feelings.

**How early sentence users communicate:**

Sentence length increasing to roughly five words.

They are becoming more grammatically precise.

Beginning to use

* prepositions – e.g.in and on
* Pronouns – at the beginning might only use **me** but will move on to **he, she , they**
* Verbs – also different forms of verbs i,.e the verb to be – I am /she is/ they are
* Plurals
* Negatives, not cant don’t
* WH questions where, when why

**How early sentence users interact**:

By approximately age 3, the early sentence user will be able to take a number of turns and a conversation can go on for longer.

They will begin to understand conversational clues i.e. glance, pause means it’s your turn.

Often easier to discuss topics child has initiated rather than topics you have initiated.

**What early sentence users will understand:**

They are beginning to understand wider concepts.

Can follow two step directions and simple stories in books

**Next steps:**

To become a later sentence user, increasing their command of grammar and ability to construct sentences.

They are becoming more confident in conversation, taking more turns, initiating and responding.

**Stage 6 Later Sentence Users**

**Why later sentence users communicate:**

Now beginning to use language to think, learn, imagine, and develop ideas.

They will plan what they want to do, anticipate what will happen next, report on imaginary experiences, create imaginary situations.

They will begin to tell stories and narratives which describe experiences, thoughts and feelings.

A three year old child may be able to tell a one or two sentence story or recount recent events but may not include detail.

You may need to ask who or what story is about.

Around four years old, stories will be getting longer e.g. Four or five more complex sentences.

They will give more info e.g. who is there, background info, how it ended.

At age five, they may add a bit more e.g. Descriptions, thoughts on how or why things happened.

**How later sentence users communicate**:

Children in this stage will be mostly using sentences which are more than four words long.

Their grammar will become increasingly correct and more complex, although still some errors.

They will begin to use different connectives, moving from **and** to **because, then, but**

Using more complex verbs e.g. I wonder, I hope, I pretend. Can use pronouns e.g. I, you we, she, they.

Sentence order more correct e.g. ‘what you are doing?’ becoming ‘what are you doing?’

Use of negatives, by 3and half using don’t cant isn’t. By four none, nothing, and past tense, didn’t, couldn’t.

Vocabulary rising to 5,000 approximately.

**How later sentence users interact**

Can take more turns in conversation

Conversations are becoming longer, even on subjects not initiated by the child.

Will understand that a pause is a signal to take a turn to talk.

Will acknowledge that they understand what you are saying.

They may switch topics to something which interests them and persist to get involved in a conversation.

They will have strategies to get the listeners attention.

**What later sentence users understand**:

They may seem to understand everything.

By five years they can understand more complex question which involve imagination and prediction.

**Next steps**:

Continue to develop increasingly complex sentences.

Become more skilled in using language as a tool for thinking learning and imagining.

Develop skills in storytelling