

# Handy Handouts®

Free informational handouts for educators, parents, and students

## Putting Words Together

by Rynette R. Kjesbo, M.S., CCC-SLP

As children approach their second birthday (around the age of 18-24 months), they often go through a phase of development that experts call a “language explosion.” During this time, children start adding new words to their vocabularies at a rapid pace. Although it typically takes children almost two years to start using their first 50 words, during this language explosion, most children add hundreds of words to their vocabularies.



### How Will I Know If My Child Is Ready to Start Putting Words Together?

Children can’t start building phrases and sentences with words until they have the right “building blocks” to use. Use the checklist below to determine if your child may be ready to start putting words together:



- **My child has a vocabulary of at least 35–50 words.** If your child doesn’t use at least 35-50 single words, he won’t have enough words in his vocabulary to start combining words.



- **My child is using some words with more than one syllable.** Just as words are the building blocks of phrases and sentences, syllables are the building blocks of words. If your child hasn’t demonstrated the ability to string syllables together in words, he is not ready to string words together into phrases and sentences.



- **My child is using words from different parts of speech.**

If your child is only using verbs (for example), it would be very difficult for him to produce phrases/sentences that make sense. In order to start combining words, a child’s vocabulary should contain a combination of nouns (e.g., doggy, cup, ball), verbs (e.g., go, eat, play), adjectives (e.g., big, pretty, hot), pronouns (e.g., mine, me, you), prepositions (e.g., up, out, in), and interjections (e.g., ouch, oops, uh-oh).



- **My child can imitate a phrase or short sentence occasionally.** Most children find imitating phrases and short sentences easier than coming up with their own phrases and sentences to say. If your child is not able to imitate phrases/short sentences (e.g., “big ball,” “shoe on,” “open bubbles”), it will be difficult for him to start producing them on his own.

# Handy Handouts®

Free informational handouts for educators, parents, and students  
(cont.)

## My Child Is Ready, So Now What?

Just as some children take a little longer to start talking, some take a little longer to start putting words together. While you can't make a child put words together, there are some things you can do to lay the foundation for him to begin using phrases and sentences:



- **Expand on your child's words/ phrases and model correct grammar usage (without pointing out your child's errors).** For example, if your child says, "Go!" or "Mama go!" respond back, "Yes! Mommy is going to work." Repeating and expanding your child's productions assures your child that you heard and understood him and it gives him a model for longer productions and proper grammar.



- **Read with your child.** Books (especially repetitive books) expose your child to language and grammar. Reading repetitive books allows your child the opportunity to participate in the reading experience by repeating the parts that are written over and over.



- **Sing familiar songs.** Like repetitive books, singing familiar songs allows your child to participate by singing the parts that he already knows. For added practice, try leaving out phrases your child can fill in on his own. For example, "Twinkle, twinkle... (little star). How I wonder... (what you are)."



- **Play and interact with your child.** When you play with your child, model language for him. The more you interact with your child and model language for him, the more he will learn about communication and language.



- **Talk to your child often and talk about everything.** Daily routines present you with great opportunities to talk about objects and activities familiar to your child. This helps him learn the meanings of words by associating the words with their related activities.

While there are some approximate milestones for typical language development, there are no set-in-stone deadlines. Some children may achieve milestones early while others may take a little bit longer to develop these skills. If you have concerns about your child's development, consult your pediatrician or a speech-language pathologist. For more information about earlier speech and language development, see [Handy Handout #15: Early Language Development \(from Birth to 12 months\)](#) and [Handy Handout #496: First Words](#).



Resources:

"Baby Talk: A Month-By-Month Timeline," accessed September 8, 2017, <http://www.parents.com/baby/development/talking/baby-talk-a-month-by-month-timeline1/>  
 "Child Language Development: What to Expect at 18-24 months," accessed September 8, 2017, <http://www.talkingkids.org/2011/04/your-talking-toddler-what-to-expect-at.html>  
 "The Language Explosion," accessed September 8, <http://www.newsweek.com/language-explosion-174934>

For more FREE Handy Handouts®, go to [www.handyhandouts.com](http://www.handyhandouts.com)