



12–36 Months

Communication/Language: Receptive & Expressive Language¹

WHEN INTRODUCED: Block 1

BEHAVIORS TO OBSERVE

- Receptive language
 - Shows awareness of the name of some familiar objects, persons, or animals
 - Shows awareness of the meaning of some simple action descriptions
- Expressive language²
 - Uses a word(s) to name or describe an object, person, animal, or action
 - Uses a word(s) to make a request or communicate a need, want, interest, or idea
 - Uses two or more different types of words (24–36 months)
 - Uses 2–3 words in same utterance (24–36 months)

EXAMPLES OF OBSERVATION OPPORTUNITIES

This *Guide* uses 12–24 months and 24–36 months age designations in relation to when specific types of emerging skills often can be observed. The age parameters are not firm. The timing of developmental pathways and milestones varies considerably across children. A 22-month-old toddler, for example, might combine two words into one utterance, a skill listed here for toddlers 24–36 months of age.

Behaviors may be observed during a care routine, playtime, or guided activity, including a book sharing. Pertinent ELM activities (Communication/Language) are cited in parentheses. The activities pertain to the age group indicated in the example or behavior description. Examples without an age identification pertain to any age of toddler (12–36 months).

Receptive language

Shows awareness of the name of some familiar objects, persons, or animals

- Looks, smiles, turns head when hears his/her name
- Points to a pictured object(s) or person named by a caregiver
 - 12–24 months: “Where are the baby’s eyes?” (Block 11, Option 2)
 - 12–24 months: “I think I see Emmanuel in this picture. Can you find Emmanuel?” (Block 10, Option 3)
 - 24–36 months: “I see another mama with her babies on this page. Can you find her?” (Block 4, Option 3)



- Points to a part of own body named by a caregiver
 - 12–24 months: “Let’s all point to our nose!” (Block 11, Option 1)
 - 24–36 months: “All of us have toes. Where are our toes? Let’s all touch our toes!” (Block 11, Option 1)

Shows awareness of the meaning of some simple action descriptions

- Responds appropriately to a caregiver’s action request, such as “Please sit down” or “Let’s wave bye-bye.”
- Appropriately acts out a story with caregiver support
 - 12–24 months: Llama Llama getting ready for bed (Block 7, Option 3); monkeys jumping on a bed (Block 8, Option 2)
 - 24–36 months: using a puppet to retell the story about the five little ducks (Block 16, Options 2 and 3)

Expressive language

Uses word(s) to name or describe an object, person, animal, or action

- repeats or says a word or repetitive phrase with a caregiver
 - 12–24 months: “swoosh” (Block 9, Option 2), “plip plop” (Block 9, Option 3)
 - 24–36 months: “But he was still hungry!” (Block 15, Option 1), “Are you my mother?” (Block 4, Option 1)
- describes the cover of, or picture, in a book
 - 12–24 months: the cover of *Five Little Monkeys* (Block 8, Options 1–3), a picture in *Rain* (Block 9, Option 3)
 - 24–36 months: “What is Llama Llama doing?” (Block 7, Option 1)

Uses a word(s) to make a request or communicate a need, want, interest, or idea

- related to a care routine
 - 12–24 months: says diaper is wet
 - 24–36 months: asks for a cracker or juice during snack time
- related to an open-ended or guided playtime
 - 12–24 months: names a toy to play with
 - 24–36 months: tells where he/she wants to play
- related to an interest
 - 12–24 months: protests or communicates disinterest, such as “no!”
 - 24–36 months: asks a question, such as “where go?”



- related to an idea
 - 12–24 months: responds with a word(s) to the question, “What are the monkeys going to do next?” (Block 8, Option 3)
 - 24–36 months: responds with a word(s) to the question, “What animal do you think this child is pretending to be?” (Block 1, Option 1)

Uses two or more different types of words (24–36 months)

- Name of object, person, or animal, such as “ball,” “Da-Da,” “pig”
- Descriptive word, such as “hot,” “dirty”
- Action word, such as “touch,” “put”
- Pronoun, such as “me,” “mine”

Uses 2–3 words in same utterance (24–36 months)

- Combines several words, such as “more juice”

EXAMPLES OF FOLLOW-UP LEARNING SUPPORTS

Reintroduce

Receptive language

Shows awareness of the name of some familiar objects, persons, or animals

- Name a food item a toddler is eating or is offered during a snack or mealtime. Point to the item as you name it. Also, say the name of an item and invite the toddler to point to it.
- 12–24 months: If a child babbles in relation to an object or person, repeat the babbling and then extend it into the beginnings of a word. Examples: “Ba-ba-ba-ba-baby!” “Ba-ba-ba-ba-da-da-duck. You’re looking at a toy duck!”
- 24–36 months: Share with a toddler a wordless picture book. Create a simple story that incorporates the name of one or two objects or persons the toddler experiences frequently at your center. Repeat the name(s) and emphasize it again as you conclude the book.

Shows awareness of the meaning of some simple action descriptions

- Say action words or short phrases while encouraging a toddler to engage in the action with you, such as “arms up,” “arms down,” “we are waving,” or “turn our head.”
- During a playtime, gently offer simple descriptions of what a toddler is doing. Emphasize the action word. Example: “You are pushing a car. Pushing. You are pushing a car.”



Expressive language

Uses word(s) to name or describe an object, person, animal, or action

- Share books that provide opportunities for a toddler to say the name of a pictured object, person, animal, or action. Point to and say the key word while the toddler looks at the corresponding book picture. Encourage the toddler to repeat the word you say. Examples:
 - 12–24 months: *Time for Bed* (Block 6, Option 1)
 - 24–36 months: *Are You My Mother?* (Block 4, Option 1)

Uses a word(s) to make a request or communicate a need, want, interest, or idea

- 24–36 months: Share books that provide opportunities for a toddler to use pictured clues to engage in guessing or predicting, such as *Is Your Mama a Llama?* (Block 4, Options 2 and 3).

Uses two or more different types of words (24–36 months)

- Share books that offer opportunities for a toddler to learn and say more than one type of word. Example: *Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes* includes names of body parts and actions with body parts, such as patting our head with both hands (Block 11, Option 1).

Uses 2–3 words in same utterance (24–36 months)

- Repeat a child’s single word utterance and then add several words to it. Example: “Lisa said, ‘Llama ride.’ Llama is riding on his scooter!” (Block 7, Option 7)
- Use a two-word utterance to describe some aspect of a child’s actions. Encourage the toddler to repeat the utterance. Examples: “Blow bubble.” “Bubble pop.” “Feeding baby.” “Rocking baby.”
- Encourage and acknowledge a toddler’s use of a two-word combination to communicate a want or need or describe a situation. Examples: “Do again.” “More song.” “All gone.”

Reinforce

Receptive language

Shows awareness of the name of some familiar objects, persons, or animals

- Say the name of a toy or other object while a toddler plays with it. Repeat the name.
- Say the name of an item(s) involved in care routines when the toddler is looking at it or using it.

Shows awareness of the meaning of some simple action descriptions

- Describe your actions and a toddler’s actions during a care routine, such as “I am putting a cup of juice in front of you,” and “You are eating a banana.” Emphasize the action word, such as “putting” and “eating.” Use short sentences.



- Emphasize action words that are part of stories you shared with a toddler. Point to and describe the part of a picture that shows the action word, such as swimming, running, or hiding.
- Use words to describe a toddler's gestures, such as "I think you want more milk." Repeat the core part of the request ("more milk").

Expressive language

Uses a word(s) to name or describe an object, person, animal, or action

- Share an age-appropriate good night book, such as *Goodnight Moon* by Margaret Wise Brown or *Good Night, Gorilla* by Peggy Rathmann. Invite a toddler to repeat the name of the object or person that is the focus of a good night message. Encourage an older toddler to say a several-word utterance by combining "good night" with the focus of the message, such as "Good night, star."
- Leave out a word in a repetitive phrase or nursery rhyme, and encourage the toddler to fill in the missing word.
- 12–24 months: Point to an image in a book picture and say its name. Then ask the toddler what we see in the picture. Example: "I see a pig." [point to pig] "What do we see?"
- 24–36 months: Encourage a toddler to describe what an existing symbol in your room tells us, such as a photo on a shelf that tells where specific toys belong or pictures of toddlers above their cubbies (Block 12, Option 1).

Uses a word(s) to make a request or communicate a need, want, interest, or idea

- 12–24 months: During a playtime or mealtime, encourage a toddler to say the name of an item he/she seems to want, such as looking at or reaching for the item. Point to and say the name of the item. Ask the toddler if he/she would like the item and, if "yes," then repeat the name of the item and encourage the toddler to say the name of the item.
- 24–36 months: Repeat Block 6, Option 3 to provide practice in predicting what a little girl will see on her walk. A toddler may enjoy making pretend binoculars with his/her fingers, as suggested in the activity description.

Uses two or more different types of words (24–36 months)

- Use a range of books that, over time, provide practice in understanding and saying different types of words, such as *From Head to Toe* for action words that describe moving parts of our body (Block 11, Option 2) and names of items eaten by *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (Block 15, Option 1).

Uses 2–3 words in same utterance (24–36 months)

- Promptly and enthusiastically draw attention to a toddler utterance that combines 2–3 words.



EXAMPLES OF PORTFOLIO ENTRIES

Landon is becoming an expert on farm animals! He enjoys sharing books about farm animals with me and especially likes to point to pictures of animals I name. I will share more farm animal books with Landon. I also will encourage him to say names of some animals. I think he is ready to repeat some names of animals that I say and maybe say an animal's name without my first saying it. Saying animal names would be a good step in the development of his language skills.

Tonya really likes The Very Hungry Caterpillar book. I read the book with her three times this past week! She says the name of some of the things eaten by the caterpillar after I say the word. I plan to encourage Tonya to say more words in the story when we read this book again. I also want to support her language skills by sharing some other books about food with Tonya.

Endnotes

- 1 The categories, behaviors, and some follow-up support examples are informed by the following source: Bricker, D., Capt, B., & Pretti-Frontczak, K. (2002). *Assessment, evaluation, and programming system for infants and children, 2nd ed., Vol. 2: Test, birth to three years and three to six years*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.
- 2 Young children often use word approximations when they are learning the name of an object, person, or action. Example: "Da" may be a younger toddler's name for a doll. Over time, toddlers begin using the customary word, especially with repeated exposure to the name of the object, person, or action. Positively acknowledge a toddler's utterance, including word(s) spoken in a language other than English.