

# Your 4 Year Old

## Speech and Language Tips



## 4 year olds sure can talk! And talk. And talk.

Now that your child is 4 years old, it seems like they're always talking! They ask lots of questions. They have conversations with you. They tell you about what happened when you weren't around. They tell you stories and have a big imagination. Your 4 year old talks about the past and wonders about what will happen tomorrow. They have a very good memory and are always saying, "Remember when we. . ."

Between 4 and 5 years old, your child will learn a lot about the world around them. They want to understand how everything fits together. Your child is getting ready for school. In fact, some children start kindergarten before they turn 5. It's amazing how much your child already knows and shares with you.



## How children learn language

Your child learns language every day, whether they're at home, at preschool, or with a friend. They learn about their world by seeing, touching, listening, tasting, and doing. Any activity you do together is a chance to learn. Talk, read, and sing with your child in the language, or languages, you use at home.

As a parent or caregiver, you play a big role in your child's learning. How you talk and respond to your child makes a difference. Taking back-and-forth turns with your child in everyday activities will help your child build language. Use activities like bedtime, cleaning up, going to a friend's house, or watering the plants. Talk about what's happening and use words that go along with these activities. Add to your child's ideas and use new words.

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It's never too early to help your child with speech and language development.

# Parents and caregivers make the difference.

## Try these tips in your language

### When talking

- **Add new words and ideas to what your child says.** Use different words that mean the same thing. Talk about how something works or what something is used for.
- **Emphasize new words.** Say new words a little louder or say them at the end of a sentence. Say, "I see an enormous worm." Or, "That worm is enormous."
- **Repeat what your child says using the correct words or sounds.** You don't need to make them say it correctly. They might say, "Him want to go to da stow." You can say, "Yes, he wants to go to the store."
- **Ask questions that let your child answer with more than 1 or 2 words.** Ask, "What are you going to do?" instead of "Are you going to bed?" Ask, "Why are you going there?" instead of "Are you going to the park?" You can also ask, "Why?" or "How?" or "What do you think will happen next?" Don't ask too many questions at one time.

### When playing or doing everyday activities

- **Let your child be the leader.** Talk about what they're doing or what they're interested in. Let them tell you how to play the game.
- **Be face to face.** Sit on the floor with your child while you're playing.
- **Try pretend play.** Your child can pretend to be the adult and you can be the child.

Good language skills help with learning to read and write. Your 4 year old already knows how to hold a book and turn pages. They know the words on the pages are what you read and that you start at the top and go down.

### When telling stories and reading

- **Pick books that have interesting stories and pictures.** Get books about places, people, animals, or activities that are different from where you live.
- **Let your child finish a sentence in a story that they know well.** Take turns reading one page at a time. Ask them to "read" the story to you, to a brother or sister, or to a stuffed animal.
- **Let your child make up their own story.** Help them cut out pictures from old catalogues, magazines, and flyers to make up a story. Or make up a story using family photos.
- **Read words on signs and labels.** Point out letters in the words. Point to letters that are in your child's name.



## When singing

- **Make up songs.** Make up your own words to familiar songs. Make up songs about what you're doing. Get your child to make up their own songs.
- **Sing slowly.** Slow down and take lots of pauses to help your child hear all the words and try to sing along.
- **Use actions.** Make up actions to go along with the words of the song.
- **Sing songs in the language, or languages, you speak at home.**



## Children learn by doing

### Activities to try

- Let your child help with cooking. Have them to measure the sugar and pour it into the bowl. Talk about measurements, how many cups of flour you need, what comes first, what comes next, and how it tastes.
- Ask your child what to do when you wash clothes. "First we put the soap in and turn on the water. Then what do we do?"
- Play rhyming games while you are driving. Make up words that rhyme, like cat, hat, bat, sat.
- When you are getting ready to visit a friend, talk about what you did last time you visited. Ask what they think they will do this time.

Some children use apps or devices to communicate, which is called Augmentative and Alternative Communication. These programs are designed to support communication and are not considered screen time.

### Screens and your child

Children learn language best from taking turns. Time spent on a screen is a missed chance to talk. Minimize screen time. Screen time is using a tablet, phone, television, or other screen. To learn more about screen time, ask a healthcare provider or visit the Canadian Paediatric Society.

## What to expect

### 4 year olds:

- pay attention to short stories.
- understand questions about a picture in a story, like “Where did the bunny go?”
- use specific words to name things, like “fireman” instead of “guy.”
- use sentences that are longer and more complete, like “I want to go out and play on the swing.”
- use a lot of sentences that have four or more words.
- pretend to be something else during play (like a teacher) with other children.
- can identify familiar signs and labels, like stop signs.

### 4 year olds:

- use the following sounds correctly: p, b, m, d, n, h, w, g, k, f, t, ng (as in sing), and y.
- may also be using sounds like s, z, l, sh, ch, j, and v.
- are understood by parents and caregivers almost all the time and most of the time by unfamiliar people.

## When to get help

### Reach out for help if your child:

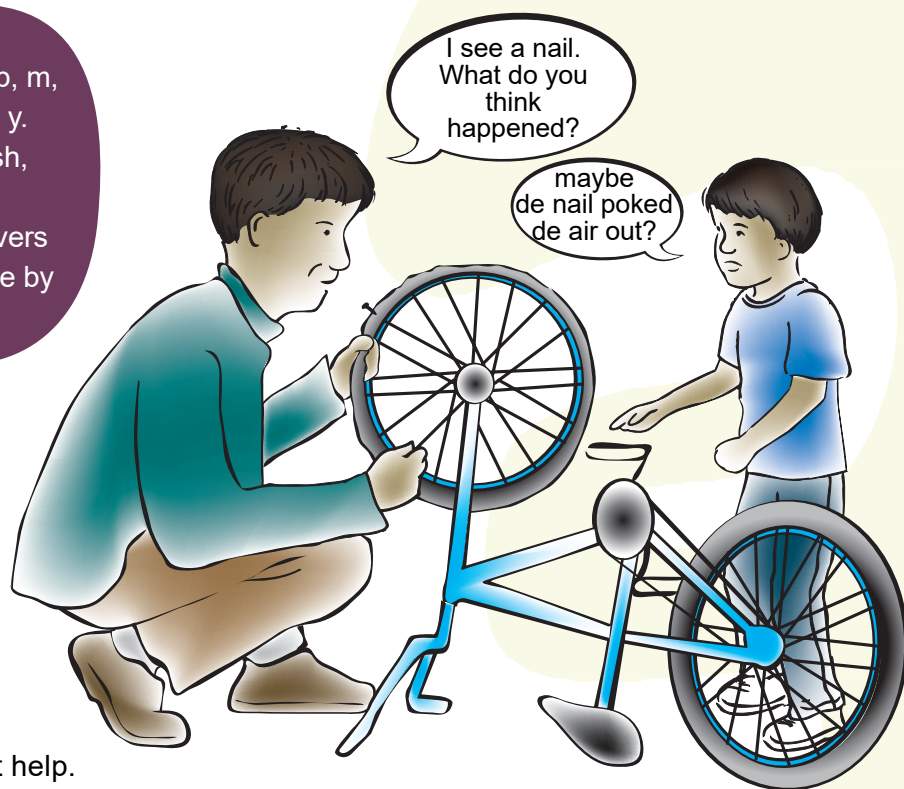
- doesn't say or understand what is expected for their age.
- doesn't use complete sentences.
- is difficult to understand.
- is frustrated.
- doesn't play with other children without help.

## Where to get help

Are you concerned about your child's speech and language development? Speech-language pathologists can help. For more information go to: [AHS.ca/PedRehab](http://AHS.ca/PedRehab)

### 5 year olds:

- understand words for concepts like colours, shapes, locations, textures (like rough or soft), time (like next or after), and numbers.
- use present, future, and past tenses. For example, “She walks to the park. She will walk to the park. She walked to the park.”
- retell a story by naming the characters and talking about what happened.
- take turns in a conversation, interrupt less, and look at the person who is speaking.
- can find the front of the book and its title. They pretend to read the story in a way that sounds like they are really reading.



### For more ideas

- [hanen.org/Helpful-Info/Parent-Tips.aspx](http://hanen.org/Helpful-Info/Parent-Tips.aspx)
- [firstwords.ca](http://firstwords.ca)