3 years
- large vocabulary, intelligible speech
- simple conversation
- many questions
- repeats nursery rhymes
- some pronunciation and sentence errors

4 years
- speech intelligible and grammatically correct
- conversation about recent events
- many questions
- repeats rhymes and songs correctly
- starting to count
- listens to long stories – confuses fact and fantasy
- some confusions common
- r-l-w-y
- p-th-f-s
- k-t

5 years
- fluent speech
- asks meanings of words
- enjoys rhymes and jingles
- enjoys stories
- enjoys jokes and riddles
- some confusions common
- th-f-s

Other formats:
If you would like this information in another language, large print or audio, please ask the department where you are being treated, to contact the patient information team: patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk.
Please note: We do not currently hold many leaflets in other languages; written translation requests are funded and agreed by the department who has authored the leaflet.

We are now a smoke-free site: smoking will not be allowed anywhere on the hospital site.
For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS stop smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169.
Language develops unconsciously and automatically. Babies are ‘pre-programmed’ to develop the necessary skills in a predictable order. Similarly, parents are ‘programmed’ to communicate with their baby in a particular way, for example, ‘baby-talk’.

Parents believe from birth, that their baby is capable of communicating with them so interpret their baby’s behaviour as meaningful and communicative. As a consequence, the infant quickly learns that s/he can affect the way the parent responds towards them.

Example:
Baby feels uncomfortable and cries. Parent interprets crying as “I’m hungry”. Parent feeds baby. Baby learns to cry for attention. This sets in motion a cycle of behaviours and responses between the parent and child that change and develop as skills are acquired - in other words, the process enables the parent to encourage, model and guide their child towards successful communication.

The following is intended as a general guide only.

Remember, individual children acquire language skills at different rates, some variation is normal.

0-1 month
- hears all sounds
- cries when hungry or uncomfortable
- some vowel-like sounds produced
- not speech-like or intentionally communicative

2 months
- vocal behaviour paired with social interaction
- prefers and responds to mother’s voice

3 months
- vocalises with pleasure or when active – squeals, yells, blows raspberries
- long strings of vowel or consonant sounds associated with activity
- cries when uncomfortable or annoyed
- quietens to mother’s voice

6 months
- vocalises to self and others – vowel-sounds, sing-song quality
- begins to recognise emotional tones
- looks to mother’s voice
- prefers to listen to “baby-talk”
- begins to self-monitor own vocalisation

9 months
- vocalises to communicate
- shouts for attention
- produces strings of tuneful babble, imitates sounds
- attends to others talking
- understands “no” and “bye-bye”
- learning communication signals
- gesture, for example, waving goodbye, shaking head for “no”, reaching up to be picked up
- eye contact
- facial expressions
- joint attention, for example pointing to pictures in story book

12 months
- jargon and intonation with speech-like quality
- enjoys imitating and turn-taking
- knows own name
- understands several words and simple instructions used in context
- producing consonant-vowel sounds, which will develop into words, for example, mama

15 months
- very vocal
- two to six recognisable words, understands many more
- communicates wishes and needs with vocalisations and gestures

18 months
- very vocal
- uses 6 – 20+ words
- copies words and sentences
- attends when spoken to
- enjoys nursery rhymes

24 months
- uses 50+ words
- two+ word sentences
- refers to self by name
- produces long monologues (variable intelligibility)
- joins in nursery rhymes and songs

30 months
- uses 200+ words
- talks intelligibly, stuttering common
- constant questions
- enjoys story books
- some pronunciation and sentence errors