

Does Your Child Understand – Development of Comprehension

Successful development of children's language skills is often determined by how well they 'speak', how many words they can put together in a sentence and the type of words that they use when speaking.

Although these aspects are undoubtedly important, it is necessary to acknowledge and be aware of the normal development of a child's comprehension or 'understanding' instructions, words and sentences that are spoken to them. For a child to be successful in their production of language it is necessary for that child to accurately develop their understanding of concepts and what is being said to them from a very early age.

During a child's development of comprehension, there are certain skills and concepts that are expected to be acquired at certain ages.

By 12 months of age a child should be able to follow simple instructions (eg. "Kiss Daddy goodnight").

By 18 months of age, children should be able to follow two consecutive directions (eg. "Take off your shoe and put them away"), recognize body parts (eg. "Where's your arm? Where's your leg? Where's your hand? Where are your eyes? Where are your ears?"), show you a range of common objects (eg. "Show me the car. Show me the ball. Show me the shoe, show me the cup") and understand simple questions (eg. "Where's your dolly?").

By 18-24 months a child should understand simple 'position' words (such as "in", "on", "out", "up", "down"), simple pronouns (eg. "me", "mine", "your"), follow 2-3 simple commands that are related (eg. "Get your cup and shoe and bring them to me") and begin to understand some complex sentences (eg. "When we go to the shop we will buy some ice cream.").

By 24 months a child should understand several hundred words.

By 36 months a child understands concepts (such as big, little, fast and slow), simple 'who', 'what' and 'where' questions, can understand and carry out two instructions that are not related (eg. "Throw the ball and then give me the teddy."), understand what objects are used for (eg. "What do we eat with?") and understand more complex sentences (eg. "After we pick up Daddy, we will go shopping.").

By 4-5 years of age a child should understand more complex location words such as 'beside', 'between', 'in front' and 'behind'. Children should also understand that objects can be put into groups such as fruit, vegetables, clothes and colours. Most 'wh' questions are also understood (eg. why, when, where, who and how).