What's typical talk at Primary?

This poster describes the stages of typical language development, with examples of what you might see and hear in a classroom or school environment.

Language development in the primary years steadily builds on the solid foundations that are established during the early years. Children's attention, listening, understanding, vocabulary, speech, grammar, storytelling and conversations all develop further in terms of skills, knowledge and complexity.

Children develop at different rates and this poster tells you what to expect at different ages. Although it is not an assessment, the information could help you identify children who are not developing language skills as expected.

Children with English as an additional language are at the same risk of speech, language and communication needs as any other child, however, this can be more difficult to identify.

4-5 years

Attention, Listening and Understanding

- Knows to look at who's talking and think about what they're saying.
- Listens to and understands instructions about what they are doing, without needing to look up.
- Understands 2 to 3 part spoken instructions:

  e.g. "Finish your picture, then sit on the carpet and look at a book."
- Can answer a 'How' or 'Why' question:

  e.g. "Why do we need sunhats on?" "To stop the sun burning our face."

Vocabulary

- Understands a range of related words to describe concepts:

  e.g. soon, early and late; soft, hard, and smooth.
- Knows words can be put into groups and can give common examples in them:

  e.g. Animals: dog, cat, horse...
- Uses words more specifically to make the meaning clearer:

  *e.g. "I saw a funny monkey. It was a **spider** monkey."*

Speech Sounds, Grammar and Sentence Building

- Says words clearly although may struggle with a few complex speech sounds, consonant blends or words with lots of syllables:

  e.g. 'Wabbit' for 'rabbit', 'bow' for 'blow', 'sketti' for 'spaghetti.'
- Uses well-formed sentences:

  e.g. "I played with Zoe in the park."

  but with some errors:

  e.g. "I falled down."
- Joins phrases with words such as: *e.g. if, because, so, could.*

Verbal Storytelling and Narrative

- Lists events with some detail:

  e.g. "I went nanny's. I had fat chips for tea. I played games on the pooter."
- Retells favourite stories - using some of their own words:

  e.g. ".....and she said what a nice mouth you got and the wolf said, 'I can eat you!' Gulp!"
- Describes events but not always joined together or in the right order:

  e.g. "I went on the top of the bus with dad. That big slide is scary. We taked the ball as well."

Conversations and Social Interaction

- Confidently starts and takes part in individual and group conversations.
- Joins in and organises co-operative role play with friends and can pretend to be someone else talking.
- Uses language to ask, negotiate, give opinions and discuss ideas and feelings:

  e.g. "Are we going to Nana's today? Can I take teddy with me? He will be sad by himself."

5-7 years

- Starts to ignore unimportant information.
- Is aware when a message is unclear and comments or asks for explanation.
- Understands complex 2 to 3 part instructions:

  e.g. "Finish your picture from yesterday then with a partner, choose one of the topic books and talk about it quietly on the carpet."
- Compares words, the way they look, sound or mean:

  e.g. "There are two words 'sea' at the beach, and you 'see' with your eyes."
- Can guess the word from clues, or give others clues using shape, size, function, etc.
- Uses newly learnt words in a specific and appropriate way:

  e.g. "Dad, you know when you have lots of lions together it is called a pride of lions."
- Speech is clear with occasional errors, especially with consonant blends.
- Has good knowledge of sounds in words.
- Asks lots of questions to find out specific information including 'How' and 'Why'.
- Uses different ways to join phrases to help explain or justify an event:

  e.g. "I'm older than you so I will go first."
- Tells stories that set the scene, have a basic plot and a sequence of events.
- Begins to be aware of what the listener already knows and checks:

  e.g. "You know where I live, right? Well, in that big house by the shop..."
- Accurately predicts what will happen in a story.
- Takes turns to talk, listen, and respond in two-way conversations and groups.
- Keeps to a topic but easily prompted to move on if it takes over.
- Copies others' language and begins to be aware of current peer language:

  e.g. Copies swear words, says, 'Cool', or 'Yeah right.'
- Uses and experiments with different styles of talking with different people.

7-9 years

- Listens to key information and makes relevant, related comments:

  e.g. "So all mammals are warm blooded, have fur or hair and their babies all drink milk."
- Identifies clearly when they haven't understood:

  e.g. "What's maize?" or "Get a blue what?"
- Able to infer meaning, reason and predict:

  e.g. "It's getting very hot in here," means open the window.
- Uses a range of words related to time and measurement:

  e.g. century, calendar, breadth.
- Uses a wide range of verbs to express their thoughts, or about cause and effect:

  e.g. "I wonder what she's thinking," or, "If we run we should get there on time but we might arrive late."
- Joins in discussions about an activity using topic vocabulary:

  e.g. "I saw some chicken eggs hatching in the incubator on the farm last Friday."
- Speech is clear, uses words with three sounds together or words with lots of syllables:

  *e.g. **spl**ash or **str**ing; rhinoceros or identical.*
- Uses regular and unusual word endings:
- *e.g. walked or fell.*
- Uses complex grammar and sentences to clarify, summarise, explain and plan:

  e.g. "So the bee collects the pollen from the stamen and then flies to another flower and pollinates it."
- Stories have a good structure with a distinct plot, an exciting event, clear resolution and conclusion:

  e.g. "...and everyone got home safely which was great."
- Uses intonation to make storytelling and reports exciting and interesting.
- Adds detail or leaves information out according to how much is already known by the listener.
- Uses formal language when appropriate in some familiar situations:

  e.g. Showing a visitor around school.
- Understands conversational rules:

  e.g. Looks at listener to judge feedback. Gives more detail if needed.
- Uses tone of voice, stress on words and gestures naturally to add meaning.
- Uses language for full range of different reasons:

  e.g. complimenting, criticising, negotiating.

9-11 years

- Sustains active listening to both what is said and the way it is said.
- Follows longer instructions that are not familiar:

  e.g. "Put the stripy folder that's on top of the cupboard into the bottom drawer of my desk."
- Understands different question types:

  e.g. open, closed, rhetorical.
- Understands simple jokes and simple idioms, but can't really explain why they are funny or what they mean:

  e.g. You can't have your cake and eat it.
- Makes choices from a wide and varied vocabulary:

  e.g. 'Leap' instead of 'jump', 'terrified' instead of 'frightened'.
- Uses sophisticated words but the meaning might not always be accurate:

  e.g. "My bedroom was meticulous."
- Knows that words can have two meanings and uses them appropriately. Can't always explain how they are linked:

  e.g. 'Hard' (rigid object and tough person).
- Uses long and complex sentence structures:

  e.g. "I will come with you only because it means you will stop going on at me."
- Uses questions to help conversations flow.
- Sentences average about 7 to 10 words - longer in stories than in conversation.
- Knows when a sentence is not grammatically correct and can explain rules of grammar.
- Tells elaborate entertaining stories which are full of detailed descriptions.
- Everyday language is detailed and not always about their immediate experience.
- Incorporates a subplot in telling stories and recalling events, before resolving the main storyline.
- Uses complex joining words: *e.g. meanwhile, therefore.*
- Uses different language depending on where they are, who they are with and what they are doing:

  e.g. Formal style with the headteacher in school; relaxed and informal with family at home; and 'cool' language with friends in the park.
- Communicates successfully; shares ideas and information, gives and receives advice, and offers and takes notice of opinions.
- Realises when people don't fully understand and tries to help them.

For further information and advice visit:
www.talkingpoint.org.uk

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This poster is based on a wide range of sources from many studies, resources and books on language development, together with professional experience.

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