

Gestalt Language Development Checklist

Understanding how your child progresses through language stages can empower you to support their communication journey. Gestalt Language Processing means that some children learn language in chunks, or “gestalts,” rather than word-by-word. This checklist will help you identify their current stage and provide practical tips.

Stage 1: Echolalia and Repetition



What it Looks Like: Your child may repeat phrases or sentences they hear from others or from media (like TV shows or songs) without yet understanding or using them flexibly.

Actionable Strategies:

- ☐ **Provide Context:** If they repeat, “Let’s go outside!” (from a show), gently link it to a current situation by saying, “Yes! We go outside to play.”
- ☐ **Use Visuals:** Pair phrases with visuals. For example, show a picture of an apple when they say, “Apple,” and connect it to snack time.
- ☐ **Encourage Comfort with Repetition:** Allow them to repeat without pressure, showing you’re listening.

Stage 2: Breaking Down Gestalts



What it Looks Like: Your child begins to modify phrases slightly. For example, they might say “I want cookie” instead of a longer, scripted sentence they’ve heard.

Actionable Strategies:

- ☐ **Model Short, Flexible Phrases:** Try saying phrases they can use in different contexts, like “I want [object]” or “It’s my turn.”
- ☐ **Introduce New Words in Context:** If they say “I want cookie,” expand with, “Yes, you want a cookie. Here’s a chocolate cookie.”





Stage 3: Creating Original Phrases

What it Looks Like: Your child begins to combine smaller parts of language to form new, unique phrases, like saying “Dog jump” instead of repeating an entire sentence about dogs.

Actionable Strategies:

- ☐ **Encourage Combining Words:** Offer examples like “Big dog,” “Jump high,” or “My turn to jump.”
- ☐ **Use Situational Examples:** When playing, say, “Your turn to build” if they’re stacking blocks, encouraging original use.



Stage 4: Fluid, Flexible Language Use

What it Looks Like: Your child starts using language in a flexible, conversational way, adding single words, phrases, or sentences as needed.

Actionable Strategies:

- ☐ **Encourage Open Conversation:** Use open-ended prompts like “What did you play today?” or “Tell me about your drawing.”
- ☐ **Explore Interests:** If they’re interested in animals, for example, talk about different types, what they eat, and where they live.