

BUILDING SENTENCES

What is this developmental skill?

Building sentences is the ability to combine words into increasingly complex and meaningful statements. Children progress from single words ("juice") to two-word phrases ("more juice"), simple sentences ("I want juice"), and eventually more complex language that communicates ideas, explanations, and experiences.

Sentence development allows children to communicate clearly, ask questions, solve problems collaboratively, and participate fully in conversations.

How does this normally develop?

Children build sentences through repeated conversations with responsive adults. Caregivers naturally model more advanced language by expanding what children say. For example, if a child says, "Dog bark," an adult might respond, "Yes, the big dog is barking because someone is at the door." Thousands of these interactions gradually teach vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure.

How can neglect interfere with its development?

Neglect often reduces both the quantity and quality of language children hear. Fewer conversations mean fewer opportunities to learn sentence structure.

Children may:

- Speak in very short sentences.
- Omit important words.
- Have limited vocabulary.
- Struggle to explain events.
- Become frustrated because others cannot understand them.

These delays reflect limited language experiences rather than a lack of intelligence.

What might this look like?

A child responds to questions with one- or two-word answers despite understanding much more than they can express. Another child says, "Boy mad toy," rather than, "The boy is mad because someone took his toy." Older children may struggle to explain classroom experiences or tell stories in a logical order.

Parenting Implications

Caregivers can strengthen sentence development by:

- Expanding children's sentences.
- Modeling rich language during everyday activities.
- Reading books together.
- Asking open-ended questions.
- Giving children time to finish speaking.
- Avoiding frequent corrections that interrupt communication.

The goal is increasing confidence while naturally exposing children to more complex language.

From Understanding to Attunement

When a child's speech seems immature, ask yourself: *"Has this child had enough meaningful conversations to practice building language?"* Children build sentences through relationships long before they build them independently.

