



What is a word?

Author : cassel



Your child is learning, every day, and she has so much to learn, it is a good thing she has a few years to do so. As parents, we are watching our little ones, taking note on their first smile, their first step, their first word. We often have a baby book to keep track of all those "firsts".

How many words?

After the child has started communicating with words, parents are often stumped by the simple question "How many words does she say?" The main reason why parents are often unable to give a clear answer to this question is because they might be unsure of what counts as a word.

"Cookie", does that count?

If the child pronounces the word "cookie" correctly, it is obvious that this is A WORD. It can be added to the baby book as a new word in the child's vocabulary. This is not a problem and nobody will wonder about this one.

"kie", does that count?

If the child says "kie" instead of "cookie", does that count as a word? Yes it does. The child has a lot to learn and remembering all the sounds and syllables in a word is a process that takes a little while. In the mean time, the child is trying to say the word, possibly as she remembers it. Two syllables is more to remember than one. And often (although not all the time) the end of the word will be said, while the beginning will be skipped. The reason is simple: that is the last thing the child remembers.

"moo-moo", does that count?

If the child says "moo-moo" for "cow", does that count as a word? This can be a little trickier and requires the parent to observe and see why the child says "moo-moo". If the child only says it when asked "What does the cow do?", then maybe it is not a WORD, but a sound only.



However, if the parent notices the child spontaneously pointing to the cows in the field and says "moo-moo", then it will look like the child is naming what she is pointing, so that might be the way the child labels that animal, and in her mind, that is the way you call it. In this case, "moo-moo" will count as a word.

"pa", does that count?

If the child says "pa" for "cookie", does that count as a word? This is a tough one, and the only person who can answer is the parent who has closely observed the child's communication. In fact, what the child is saying might not be a word as you would find in the dictionary, and it might not sound like the target word either, but if the child says the exact same thing to call this object, all the time, it might just be a distorted version of another word she has associated with it. Maybe you have called those cookies "bear paws" a few times and that is what the child remembered, and now, all the cookies are "bear paws" in her mind, but as she cannot yet say "bear paw", maybe she is actually saying "paw". So, would "paw" be a word? Of course, since that is what she calls it!

A sign, does that count?

If the child has learned a specific gesture for "cookie", does that count as a word? Here, the question is mostly about what information you are gathering. If you want to know the number of verbal words the child says, obviously, it would not count, but if you want to just make an inventory of "words" the child can use to label objects, actions and attributes, then such a specific gesture becomes a sign, and that will count.

Pointing, does that count?

If the child points to the cookies to mean "cookies", does that count as a word? Although pointing is a great way for young children to communicate, especially for things that are in their environment, pointing does not count as a word mainly because it is not a specific label for this object. She can point at the cookies, she can point at the bottle, she can point at the dog, she can point at Daddy. This gesture is generic, therefore, not counting as a word.

How many words does your child has?

Have you observed your child's communication? How many words would you say she has in her vocabulary? Now, take note of her words for a few days, whether they are clearly pronounced, distorted, maybe totally different. Write them down. Did you estimate correctly or is she saying more than you thought?

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