

# HELPING YOUR BABY TO TALK

## **BABIES LEARN HOW TO LISTEN AND TALK BY LISTENING TO YOU TALK**

When you are close to your baby, when you look at them and talk to them, they can see your face and hear your voice.

Hearing your voice and the words you are saying helps babies to become interested in language. Seeing your face while you talk keeps babies interested in what you are saying and lets them see how we use our mouths to make words.

When we talk to babies about what we are doing, like changing their nappy or shaking a rattle, we help them link the words we are saying with what is happening. For example, when we shake a rattle and say “shake, shake, shake”, we are teaching the baby that the movement is called “shake”. When we say, “let’s change your nappy” and show the baby a nappy, we are teaching the baby that this is a nappy.

The more we speak with our babies, the more chances we give them to learn and understand new words.

Show your baby what is happening around them. Talk about what is happening, for example “Look at the leaves waving in the wind. It’s a windy day!” or “That’s a loud sound! Mummy’s phone is ringing!” Point to what you are talking about to help them understand what you mean.

You might feel silly talking to your baby like this at first, when you think they can’t understand you. But this is how babies LEARN how to understand what we are saying!

Read books with your baby. They won’t understand the story at first, but they will enjoy listening to the sound of the words. Read the story and talk about the pictures. When you name the pictures, they will begin to link the word to the picture, for example “doggy” or “sun”.

Sing songs to your baby. Babies love to hear the music of your singing voice, and songs help your baby learn the rhythm of language.

When your baby is a few months old, they may try to take turns making noises with you. Babies love it

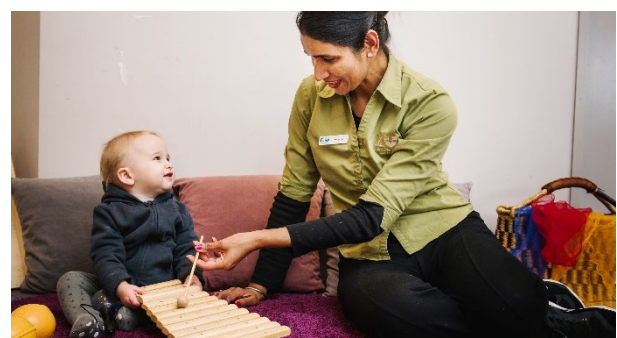
when we copy their expressions or noises that they make and then wait for them to have a turn copying us. This teaches your baby how we take turns in conversation.

Babies love looking at our faces, so try to be face-to-face with your baby as much as possible. This lets our baby see our expressions, clearly hear our voice, and lets us notice what our baby is interested in. Some ideas to help you be face-to-face with your baby are:

- ▶ Read books while sitting with your knees up and your baby sitting in your lap facing you
- ▶ If your pram seat can face towards or away from you, have it so your baby is looking at you
- ▶ Sit at the table while your baby is in their highchair
- ▶ Sit on the floor while your baby is laying on a mat or in a bouncer

## **CHILDREN WITH AUTISM**

As babies, children who are later diagnosed with Autism may communicate differently. Some babies might not make eye contact with us or might not seem to seek out people. Some babies may have difficulty looking at things we are pointing at, or taking turns making noises with us in ‘conversation’. It can be difficult to keep talking to your baby if they don’t seem interested. However, the more opportunities we give our babies to see our face, hear us talk, and the more we explain what is happening around them, the more chances we give them to learn. This is true for all babies.



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## WHEN DO BABIES LEARN TO TALK AND LISTEN?

Babies understand what we are saying before they learn to talk. Babies start listening to our voices before they are born. They love hearing our voices when we talk to them. The more we talk with our babies, the more chances we give them to understand what we are saying and to learn to talk.

### BABIES 0-3 MONTHS

Very young babies will show they are listening to us by turning their heads, widening their eyes, and waving their arms or legs when they hear our voice. Young babies will startle to loud noises and may cry. Young babies tell us what they need by crying, and they are calmed when we speak to them in soothing voices. Around 8 weeks of age, babies begin to make cooing sounds. Most babies enjoy looking at people's faces. At around 3 months, most babies will begin to smile.

### BABIES 3-6 MONTHS

Between 3-6 months, most babies will be smiling and cooing a lot. They will start to take turns making noises with you, and love it when you copy what they do, for example smile, frown, or make a noise. Babies this age start to become more interested in what is happening around them. Most babies will begin to laugh around this time.

### BABIES 6-9 MONTHS

At this age, babies will start to become very noisy! They will enjoy cooing, making squealing noises, blowing raspberries, and laughing. Around 6-8 months, babies may begin to babble, making noises like "baba" or "mama". Babies often begin to turn around or look at you when you say their name at this age. Babies this age will start to communicate with us on purpose, for example to get our attention or to show us something.

## BABIES 9-12 MONTHS

Babies this age will be babbling a lot and making different sound combinations like "bada" or "mapa". When babies this age babble, it may begin to sound like a "conversation", with sounds that go up and down in intonation. Babies love to take turns speaking with others at this age, taking turns babbling and talking with you. Babies will often use sounds including m, n, b, d, t, w, and h by 12 months. Babies this age will understand "no" and the names of familiar objects and people. By 12 months, babies will look at what you point to. They will point to things to show you, and begin to start waving, clapping their hands and gesturing for "up". By 12 months, babies will be making eye contact, and will seek your attention. Babies start to become aware around this time that what they do has an effect on what you do. Babies often say their first words around 12-15 months.

## WHEN TO BE CONCERNED

Sometimes we might feel like our baby isn't doing everything they should be doing. Some signs you should speak to a speech pathologist about your baby's communication include:

- ▶ **By 6 months:** It is a concern if by 6 months, babies are not reacting to sounds and people's voices, in particular loud sounds. It is a concern if babies are not smiling at others, making eye contact, or making cooing sounds by 6 months.
- ▶ **By 12 months:** It is a concern if babies are not babbling with lots of different sounds by 12 months. It is a concern if babies are not looking at things you point to, using gestures such as waving and pointing, are not interested in other people, or smiling at you when you smile at them by 12 months.

## TODDLERS AND TALKING

When babies become toddlers, it is often a time they learn lots of new words. It is exciting to see toddlers learn and explore. We can help toddlers

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learn to talk by naming objects for them, having conversations, reading books and signing songs.

## TODDLERS 12-18 MONTHS

Toddlers usually say their first words between 12-15 months. The words they use may not sound exactly the way we say them. They may be shortened or simplified, for example they may say “wawa” for water. By 18 months, toddlers will understand lots of familiar words and simple sentences, for example they may point to their drink bottle when asked “Where’s your drink bottle?” Toddlers will be using gestures such as pointing, waving and lifting their arms for “up”.

At this age, toddlers will be able to understand simple directions such as “put the blocks in the box”. Toddlers love songs, books and spending time with other people.

## TODDLERS 18 MONTHS-2 YEARS

By 18 months, most toddlers will be using at least 20 words. By 2 years, most toddlers will be using at least 50 words, and be starting to put two words together, for example “more milk” or “mama up”. At this age, most toddlers can point to body parts such as their nose and tummy, point to pictures in books, and name familiar items and people. Toddlers this age will enjoy copying actions, noises, and new words during play. They will begin to use pretend play, such as feeding a teddy or doll, and putting it to bed. Most toddlers can follow a simple direction such as “go and get your teddy” at this age. Toddlers understand much more than they can say.

## WHEN TO BE CONCERNED

Sometimes we might feel like our toddler isn’t doing everything they should be doing. Some signs you should speak to a speech pathologist about your toddler’s communication include:

- ▶ **Toddlers 12-18 months:** It is a concern if toddlers are not using any words by 15 months, and 20 words by 18 months. It is a

concern if toddlers this age do not understand names of familiar items or people or cannot understand simple sentences. It is a concern if toddlers this age are not giving or showing things to you to share their interest.

- ▶ **Toddlers 18 months-2 years:** It is a concern if by 2 years, toddlers cannot say at least 30-50 words. It is a concern if toddlers this age are not using the names of familiar items and familiar people such as “mum” and “dad”. It is a concern if toddlers this age cannot follow a simple direction such as “come and get your drink” or “where’s your tummy?”.

If you are concerned about your toddler’s communication development, the best thing to do is speak to a speech pathologist.

