

# Helping your baby to talk



*Please read the Important Notice on the reverse of this Fact Sheet.*

Every baby learns to talk by listening to people talk, by playing with sounds and words, and by talking to others.

Your baby begins to learn language skills from the moment she is born. The first language skill to develop is known as *receptive* - understanding what is heard. *Expressive* - speaking skills - develops later.

You can help your baby develop both kinds of language in the following ways:

## Talking

- Talk to your baby often, but make sure you speak slowly. To give baby the chance to begin picking out words, you must speak slowly, clearly and simply most of the time.
- Use a variety of words, not just the names of things.
- Do focus on single words, especially words which are commonly used in baby's everyday language, such as nappy, cup, bath...
- Emphasise imitation. As your baby begins to learn new sounds, imitate them. An entire conversation can be built around a few vowels and consonants.
- Wait for a response. Even if your baby cannot talk in words, she may have a response to an activity you have proposed, such as a squeal or whimper.
- Pause often so that your baby has the chance to understand and talk back to you.

## Show baby you listen

- Take turns when you play and talk, just as you would hold a conversation.
- Listen to your baby.
- Look at your baby's face. Smile or reply to your baby's sounds.
- Show that you are listening. Repeat baby's words.

## Playing

- Create opportunities for your baby to play with other children. Join a play group or toy library.
- Play close to your baby. Copy some of her actions, facial expressions or sounds, and show her new actions. Play hiding games, like peek-a-boo.
- Finger games, soft dolls and stuffed toys, balls, blocks and activity boards all help to develop baby's fingers and hands, as well as listening and learning skills.
- Build a repertoire of songs and rhymes. You may find it tedious to sing the same words over and over again, but it helps baby learn.
- Sharpen baby's hearing skills. When a plane flies overhead or the door bell rings, point them out to baby. This helps baby understand the world of sounds and learn new words at the same time.
- Select suitable television programs for your baby, and watch them together.

## Share books

- Even if baby cannot read or listen to stories, share them for a few minutes a day.
- Choose books with large, bright pictures. Babies love pictures of babies.
- Do plenty of pointing out of single objects, animals or people. Eventually your baby will surprise you by responding.
- Let your baby show books to you. Visit your library, and choose books together.
- Tell your baby stories, and repeat favourites.



## Step by step in learning

Babies develop at different rates. Even so, before their first birthday most babies will:

- enjoy watching your face
- show delight when you reply to their chatter
- love you imitating them
- notice familiar sounds and voices
- enjoy books and music
- play with sounds
- understand their name, basic commands - such as 'no' - and the names of familiar objects
- understand daily routines, such as bath and bed times
- try to join in with action songs
- eat a range of food tastes and textures
- chew a variety of foods well
- try to drink from a cup
- attempt some real words, and
- sound as though they are speaking your language.

Most babies will say their first words between 12 and 18 months. They will have a burst of language development before they turn two, and begin to join words together by two and a half years.

Most three year olds will use three to four word sentences and be understood by familiar adults most of the time. By four, children will use four to five word sentences, use grammar correctly most of the time, and be understood by most people.

## When to seek help

A speech pathologist has been professionally trained to advise, diagnose and work with adults and children who have communication disabilities. Speech pathologists work in a variety of settings including schools, health centres, hospitals or private practice.

Your child health nurse may be able to put you in contact with a speech pathologist if you are worried about your child's language development, and particularly if:

- your baby does not seem to listen to you, enjoy sounds or respond to them
- your baby has difficulty sucking, chewing, swallowing or biting
- your baby isn't using real words by 18 months
- your toddler is frustrated by not being able to speak to others
- your toddler has trouble understanding what you say
- your toddler stutters
- your toddler has an unusual voice, for example it sounds husky
- your toddler isn't trying to make sentences by two and a half years.

## For further information:

Most speech pathologists belong to Speech Pathology Australia, which is the official body representing speech pathologists, the professionals who work with and advocate for people who have a communication disability.

## References

Please contact Speech Pathology Australia's National Office for the references used to create this Fact Sheet.

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