

Early Communication

Parents play an essential role in encouraging your baby's speech and language development. The following activities are designed to help you encourage your baby's early communication skills, to help them to experiment with sounds and to develop an awareness of their lips and tongue.

Don't expect your baby to copy your sounds to start with. They will be listening, watching and learning.

Eye Contact

Good eye contact helps your child get more information about what is happening around them. Here are some ideas to help develop eye contact:

- Squeaky toys – hold a squeaky toy near your face and press it to make a noise. Stop the noise and wait for eye contact before starting again.
- Scarves – put a scarf over your head and play peep-po games.

Attention

Paying attention to what is going on around them helps children to begin to understand language. Here are some games you play to increase your child's length of concentration:

- Use balloons to catch your child's attention; blow them up and let them go, feel the air come out of them, throw and catch them, draw faces on them.
- Feely bags – have a toy which is of interest to your child, e.g. a favourite teddy. Place it in a box and open it slowly. Let your child put his/her hand in and feel it. Take the object out, name and play with it.
- Toy bricks – build towers or walls and knock them down. Line the bricks up and push them along a table, like a train. Bang bricks together.
- Play peep-po games, e.g. hide your face behind your hands or hide bricks under a cloth etc.
- Lift-the-flap books and singing rhymes and songs.

Listening

Listening can help your child to become more aware of sound by giving him/her lots of experience of different sounds. Here are some ideas:

- Draw attention to any sounds you hear in everyday situations, e.g. the doorbell, the vacuum cleaner, bus, phone ringing, dog barking, taps dripping etc.
- Try not to have too much background noise, turn off the TV and radio, and talk together.

- Listen to what your child is saying and respond. Have pretend conversations, taking turns and encouraging a range of sounds; speak close to your child's face.
- Babble – take turns to babble and make the most of facial expressions during your chats with your child.
- Vary the range of sounds in your voice for your child to listen to. Vary the pitch of your voice when you talk.
- Sound Shakers – put small objects inside old pots or tins, and shake them to make a noise. Let your child shake them so that he/she can feel the vibrations too. The objects should be of something of interest to your child, e.g. a small coloured brick, which he/she can then take out of the container and play with. Remember not to use things that are small enough to swallow.
- Sound Play – choose a noise-making object, e.g. drum, whistle, squeaky toy. When your child is not looking, make a noise and see if he/she responds. If your child turns to the sound give him/her the toy. Play with the toy together.
- Stop/Start games – choose a sound e.g. 'ahhh' or 'oooo'. Using a toy car or a wind-up toy, push it along the table, using your voice 'ahhh' at the same time.
- 'Go Game' – using a favourite mobile toy, e.g. a car, encourage your child to wait to hear the word 'Go' before he/she pushes the toy.
- Build a tower of bricks – build it up and push it over when you hear the word 'Go'.

Babbling and Early Sound Development

When your baby is a few months old they will begin to babble (make lots of different sounds). You can help this develop by:

- Having babble 'conversations' with your baby. Start with strings of sounds the child is already using, e.g. 'mamama', 'nanana', 'wuwuwu'. Vary the vowel sounds (ah, eh, eye, oh, oo) and the pitch of the voice (deep voice and high voice). Certain speech sounds usually emerge before others, e.g. 'w, m, d, b'. Use these sounds in your babble 'conversation' with your child.
- Put your face close to your child's. You can encourage them to feel your face and their own, when they are babbling.
- Make sounds on their body, watch and wait e.g. say 'bbb' on their tummy, 'www' on their foot, 'hhh' on their face. If they like it do it again.
- Swing your child or bounce him/her up and down on your foot (e.g. riding the horse). At the same time make your own voice go higher when you say 'up' and lower when you say 'down'.
- Sing simple songs with a well-known melody. You can adapt these songs to include babble sounds e.g. the wheels on the bus go 'bbb bbb', the babies on the bus go 'wa wa wa', the mummies on the bus go 'sh sh sh' etc.
- Encourage sounds to accompany play, e.g. saying:

- o 'ah' when cuddling a teddy or doll
- o 'brum brum' when playing cars
- o 'nee naw' for siren noises
- o 'mmm' when playing tea parties
- o 'sh' to mean to be quiet
- o 'uh oh' when something goes wrong
- Encourage your child to listen to and use animal sounds:
 - o 'moo' for a cow
 - o 'woof woof' for a dog
 - o 'baa baa' for a sheep
 - o 'meow' for a cat

Lip Play

Your child will be exploring just what his/her mouth can do. To help develop use of his/her lips:

- Rub the lips with Vaseline. When the lips are sticky, the child will be able to feel the sensation of placing the lips together more easily.
- Make lip movements in a mirror with your child, e.g. smiling, pursing lips to make a kiss, blowing raspberries, making wide open mouths yawning, popping cheeks