

# Helping your baby to talk

**Language is fundamental** to your baby's development. Every baby learns to speak by listening, playing with sounds and talking to others.

Babies begin to learn from the moment they are born – first receptive language skills (understanding what they hear), then expressive language skills (speaking).

You can help develop both kinds of language skills by talking, watching, listening, playing and sharing books with your baby.

## Talking

- Talk to your baby often, speaking slowly, clearly and simply
  - Emphasise words for the objects most commonly used in your baby's world
  - Use a variety of words to describe what is happening around you, not just the names of things
  - Repeat words – your baby will begin to understand the meaning of them if they hear them often
  - Imitate the sounds your baby makes or say the word they may be trying to use
  - Comment on the sounds you hear to draw your baby's attention to the sound
  - Take turns when you talk and play, pausing to listen and speak just like you would in an adult conversation
- Watch your baby and copy their actions and sounds. Show them new actions and activities
  - Choose games and toys appropriate to your baby's age that encourage exploration, problem solving and interaction between you and your baby.
  - Finger games, soft dolls and stuffed toys, balls, blocks and activity boards all help to develop your baby's fingers and hands, as well as listening and learning skills
  - Build a repertoire of songs and rhymes. Singing the same words over and over again will help your baby learn language and rhythm



## Playing

- Babies learn about talking and listening through play, so it's important to set aside time to play with your baby each day
  - Create opportunities for your baby to play with other children by joining a play group or toy library, or spending time with people who also have young children
- ## Share books
- Early reading promotes good language and thinking skills, preparing children for learning to read and write.
- Read to and with your baby from birth – make books part of your daily routine
  - Choose books with large, bright pictures. Babies love pictures of other babies and photos of their family
  - Point to and name objects, animals or people – eventually your baby will respond

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- Let your baby show books to you. Visit your local library, and choose books together
- Read your baby's favourite books again and again!

## Language Milestones

All babies develop at different rates, however before their first birthday most babies:

- are interested in watching your face
- show delight when you reply to their chatter
- respond to you imitating them
- notice familiar sounds and voices
- recognise familiar people and respond to them
- enjoy books and music
- play with sounds (babbling) and words
- respond to their name, basic commands – such as 'no' – and the names of familiar objects

- enjoy and participate in daily routines, such as bath/bed times
- participate in action songs

Most babies say their first words between 12 and 18 months, although the words may not sound exactly like they should (e.g. 'ba' for ball or 'mumu' for milk).

Just before they turn two, children will have a burst of language development and have a vocabulary of around 50 words, then start joining words together by around two and a half. Most three year olds will use three to four word sentences and be understood by familiar adults, while by the age of four children will generally use four to five word grammatically correct sentences that are able to be understood by everyone.

For information about speech development between the ages of one to five years, see **"The Sounds of Speech"** fact sheets (**"0 to 3 years"** and **"preschool and school aged children"**).

## When and where to seek help

Speech pathologists are trained to advise, diagnose and work with adults and children who have communication and feeding difficulties. To find a speech pathologist speak to your GP or child health nurse about local public services or go to [www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au](http://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au) and use the "Find a Speech Pathologist" search.

If you are worried about your baby's communication, contact a speech pathologist, and particularly if: your baby does not seem to listen to you, enjoy sounds or respond to them; your baby isn't using a range of words by 18 months; your toddler is frustrated by not being able to speak to or be understood by others; your toddler has trouble understanding what you say; your toddler does not engage in simple games with you or understand your gestures/signs; your toddler stutters; your toddler has an unusual voice (e.g. it sounds husky); your toddler isn't trying to join words together by two and a half years.

## How do I become a speech pathologist?

Speech pathology is an accredited undergraduate or entry level masters degree.

To find out more go to [www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au/education-and-careers/university-courses](http://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au/education-and-careers/university-courses)

## How do I find a speech pathologist in my area?

Go to [www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au](http://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au) and click on "Find a Speech Pathologist".

For further information contact **Speech Pathology Australia** – the national peak body representing speech pathologists, the professionals who work with and advocate for people who have a communication disability and all Australian consumers of speech pathology services.