

Talking & listening (Children 0–6 months)

Listening is key to all effective communication. Without the ability to listen effectively, messages are easily misunderstood – communication breaks down and the sender of the message can easily become frustrated or irritated.

If there is one communication skill you should aim to help your children master, it is listening! Good listening has been shown to increase self-esteem and improve relationships.

Conversations with baby

Children learn to talk by hearing and listening to others speaking and by our encouragement to join in conversations.

- Talk to baby right from birth.
- Be a good model, use full sentences and avoid "baby talk."
- Talk to baby often, making eye contact and responding to the sounds baby makes with smiles and appreciation.

Baby will soon be babbling along practising sounds and following meaning well before baby can actually say a recognisable word.

Activity Suggestions

- Use simple sentences to tell baby what you are doing, as you do it. e.g. "Here are your pants. Let's put your pants on. Foot first!" etc. When you repeat this regularly baby learns to anticipate what will happen and the meaning of those sounds.
- Make nappy change time a special time to chat. Put some clear simple pictures of familiar things on the wall nearby or hang different mobiles to see and talk about.
- Go for a walk carrying baby and talk to baby about things along the way.

- Tell baby what you are doing even if that is only housework that you find boring.

For example: "Now I will tidy the lounge room, pick up all the toys and fold the washing". This might be boring to you but baby will be listening to the patterns and sounds of our language. If baby coos or babbles as, well stop and try and respond. You could try and copy her sounds so that she knows you are responding. Then helping baby learn to talk while you work will make housework a lot more interesting!

Fun with words

Enjoy some poems and word games with baby so she will want to join in and be encouraged to learn to talk. Make playtime a close and cuddly time with lots of expressive words and giggles. These short fun moments will help baby to:

- Feel loved and cherished
- Experience the relaxation of fun and laughter (hopefully you will too)
- Hear words and language patterns
- Begin to understand how we take turns in conversations and games

Activity Suggestions

- Try Heads and Shoulders Knees and Toes by gently touching each part of baby's body then take baby's hands and end with more vigorous clapping and smiles of course!
- Hold baby's feet and gently pump legs while saying poem "*Knees, knees, jolly fat knees, who gave you such jolly fat knees? Lot's of bread and butter, vegemite and cheese, that's what gave you jolly fat knees!*" And have a gently but jolly time as you play.
- Play peek-a-boo from behind a scarf or something that's a little see-through so that baby is not frightened when you suddenly appear. Use simple language. "*Where am I?*" "*Here I come.*" "*There you are!*" Make it fun with funny looks on your face and enjoy the game too.
- Play the tickling game, This Little Piggy Went to Market, giving each little toe a squeeze then finally a gentle tickle.

Listening Time

Conversation is a two way process where people take turns speaking and listening.

In time baby learns about this process. We can help baby learn about this by paying special attention to turn taking when we play or interact with baby.

Enjoy listening to sounds together.

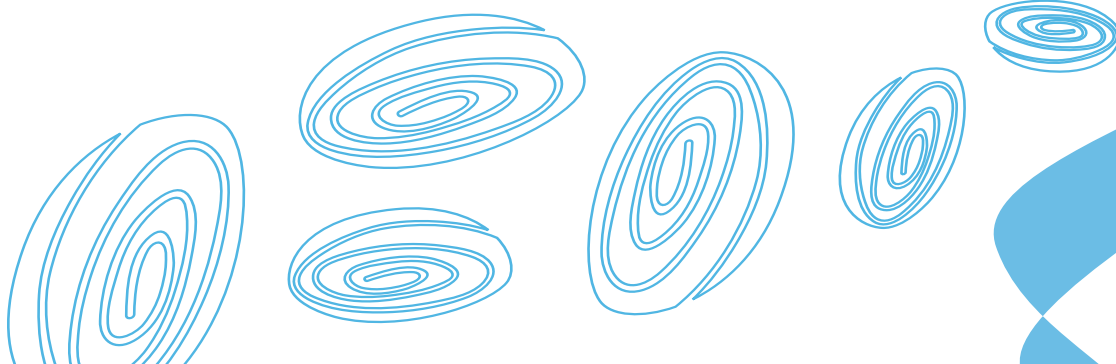
- Sharing a rattle. Show baby a rattle and let baby hear its sound then give baby a turn. When baby has managed to shake and create the sound as well, try taking the rattle again yourself, repeating sounds then returning the rattle to baby. Thus taking turns.
- During play times offer baby different interesting sound makers to listen to and explore and continue to play the game above.

At times you can just stop, relax and enjoy listening to baby babbling to herself without interrupting, because baby also needs time to just practise by himself.

Activity Suggestions

- Hang some chimes for baby to listen to. When you take baby to the chimes ask if she would like to hear the chimes as you reach towards them. Wait for baby to look at the chimes (or you) before you actually touch and move the chimes to hear them. Waiting for baby's response helps them learn that conversation is a turn taking business.
- If by chance baby is practising making sounds or babbling try to enter this babbling conversation by copying or responding then waiting for baby to try again.

In practical terms when communicating it is also important for children to learn to make eye contact with people when they speak to them.



Touch and Feely Books

When your child is able to sit up with support or by herself it is a good time to introduce baby to books. The library has a wonderful collection of books. Look for books with very simple pictures, that are sturdy and colourful. Babies love circular shapes and faces.

Show baby how to turn the pages and comment on each page as you rub and feel the different textures. Babies enjoy exploring different textures and a texture book helps them understand how books work.

You can also read books aloud that you enjoy, and prop your little one up beside you. You can read babies to sleep and enjoy your magazine or book while you are doing it. They love the sound of your voice, and you are introducing the idea of enjoying books.

Activity Suggestions

Offer baby a home made touch and feely book. These are especially fun to make with the help of older children.

- Different textures can be stitched onto heavy fabric or even onto kitchen cleaning wipes so the book is easy to wash.
- Pages can be attached together using plastic curtain rings so pages can be removed and new pages added to keep baby interested.

Be sure that nothing can be pulled off to become a choking hazard.

Funny Faces

A conversation is more than a string of words shared with others. Conversations are shared turn-taking experiences. Also when people talk to each other they gain clues about the conversation by observing facial expressions and body language.

Even before baby learns to properly say one word, they can learn and understand the turn-taking business and observe facial expressions.

- Babies naturally observe and study faces as they get to know the familiar people in their lives.
- Babies naturally copy movements they see as they learn to control their muscles, including all the small muscles in their face

Activity Suggestions

- When you are close to baby make some funny faces e.g. poke out your tongue, pucker your lips out, blink your eyes tightly, or blow raspberries if you can.
- Then give baby a turn. It is amazing to watch even a very young baby try to do the same thing.
- As baby begins to practise making sounds offer some sounds for baby to copy with exaggerated facial expression e.g. mum-mum-mum, da-da-da, bu-bu-bu. Have fun and enjoy the facial exercises!

Books to enjoy with little babies

Baby animals - Rod Campbell

Baby Faces - Margaret Miller

Baby Ways - Nola Allen

Big Book of Beautiful Babies - David Ellwand

Hat off, Baby! - Jan Ormerod

Hug - Jez Alborough

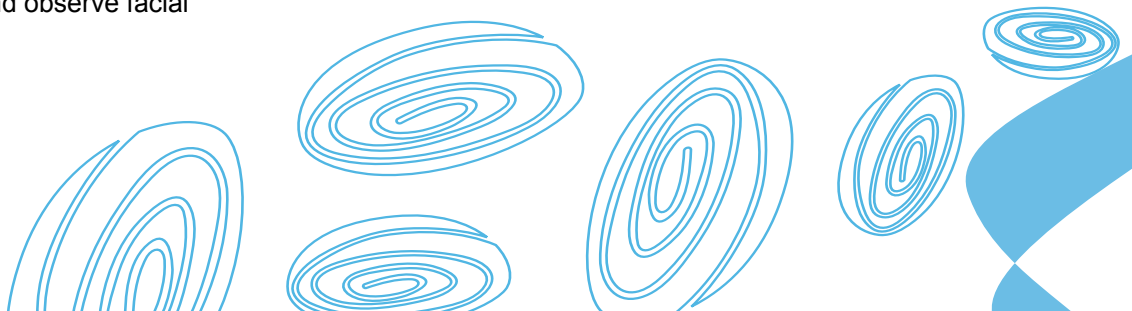
My Big Book of Noises - Amy McDonald

Read to your Bunny - Rosemary Wells

See-Saw! - Annie Kubler

The Baby's Catalogue - Janet Alberg

Where is the Green Sheep? - Mem Fox



Want more information?

Kids Spot

Teach your baby fun games and activities to play that are simple and enjoyable for baby and you.

<http://www.kidspot.com.au/things-to-do/collection/baby-games-and-nursery-rhymes/GreatStart>

Department for Education and Child

Development website with lots of ideas and activities to do with children to make the most of everyday learning opportunities
www.greatstart.edu.au

The Little Big Book Club

Provides free packs of books for babies and toddlers – available from libraries and the Child and Family Health Service. The website has free Activity Time and Learning Time sheets to complement books and e-books to read online
www.thelittlebigbookclub.com.au

Dads' Read

Information for dads about reading with children www.dadsread.org.au

Let's Read

Supports families to share words, rhymes, songs, books and stories with children
www.letsread.com.au

Parentline NSW

Phone 1300 1300 52
For advice on child health and parenting
www.parentline.org.au

Raising Children

The Australian Parenting website. For information on raising children, including information for grandparents raising grandchildren.
<http://raisingchildren.net.au/>

Local Services

YWCA NSW - Kids for Life playgroup

Fun and friendly playgroup with a target age from 0-5yrs.

Phone 02 6625 5800

Lismore Toy Library

Low cost access to variety of toys

Phone 02 6622 3424

Story time and Baby Bounce

Lismore and Goonellabah Library

Phone 02 6625 5100

Brighter Futures

Support services for improving emotional, social, health and education development outcomes for families and their children.

Phone 02 6682 4334

Goonellabah Child and Family Health Centre

Phone 02 6625 0111

9am – 4:30pm, Monday to Friday to make an appointment.

Refer to Service Listing - Baby and Child Services for more information on Playgroups and Activities