

Helping babies and toddlers with speech and language skills



The list below has some ways to help your toddler learn to speak. Please feel free to ask us questions!

“Baby talk”

Your baby learns speech and language skills by interacting with others. There are many ways you can help your baby develop communication skills.

From birth

- Talk to your baby from the time they are born. Hold your baby close to you, so they can watch your face when you speak.
- Call your baby by name.
- Try to imitate the sounds your baby makes.
- Make eye contact, and smile as you talk.
- Laugh when your baby laughs.
- Talk to your baby during feeding and bath time.
- Massage your baby’s gums and cheeks.

3 to 4 months

- Use rattles and toys that make sounds or music. Encourage your baby to turn their head by moving a toy from one side of your baby’s head to the other. This will also help your baby follow objects with their eyes.
- Help your baby learn new sounds by saying consonants such as p, b, m or g with vowels. Say these sounds in strings, such as “be be be” and “ma ma ma”. Imitate the sounds your baby makes.
- Talk to your baby about what you are doing. Use single words or short phrases and sentences. Stress the names of objects and people that are important to your baby like bottle, car, mama and daddy.
- Hold objects close to your mouth, so your baby can see how your tongue and lips move when you say the words.
- Teach your baby different types of words, nouns, verbs and adjectives. Use objects, such as mobiles, balls, dolls and other toys.

5 months

- Make your baby alert to sounds around them.
- Point out sounds like the phone, doorbell and animals.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.

Helping babies and toddlers with speech and language skills, continued

6 to 7 months

- Teach your baby gestures, such as pointing, waving “bye-bye” and shaking their head “no”. Say the words as you do the gestures.

7 to 8 months

- Teach your baby to play “peek-a-boo”, “itsy-bitsy spider”, “patty-cake” and other games that use speech and gestures.
- Say nursery rhymes, and sing songs with your baby.
- Help your baby make animal sounds when you name animals.
- Use routines, such as bedtime and feeding, to help your baby learn about the events in their world.

9 to 12 months

- Encourage your baby to follow simple directions like, “Go get your doll,” or “Give me your bottle.” Point or hold out your hand to help your baby understand.
- Teach your baby to point to familiar objects by asking things like, “Where is the cat?”

12 to 16 months

- Teach your child the names of simple body parts like eyes, ears and nose. Help your child point to them during bath time or while you both look in the mirror.
- Help your child name routines, objects and actions while they happen. Name things, such as mirror, eat, bed, up, down and more.

Play and language

- Play is an important way to help your child learn new skills, such as speech and language. Spend time playing with your child each day.
- Follow your child’s lead. Let them choose what to play.
- Encourage activities that are on your child’s level. Your child may not want to do things that are too hard.
 - Do things your child can already do.
 - Add new things only if your child can do them.
 - If your child stops, go back to something easier for them.
- Make eye contact during play. Get on a level that allows you to be face-to-face with your child.
- Imitate your child while playing. Play with toys the same way your child plays with them. Allow your child to be creative with toys.
- As your child gets older, ask them to talk about what they are doing. If your child does not talk, you can talk about what is happening like, “You are pushing the car.”

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Helping babies and toddlers with speech and language skills, continued

- Take turns with your child to help them learn to communicate.
 - Give your child time to respond.
 - Take your turn, and then wait for your child to respond with sounds, words or action.
 - Help your child learn to wait until their turn by saying things like, “Wait. It is my turn.”
- Name things, and talk about what happens during daily routines like bath time, meals and getting dressed. Reinforce your child’s speech. If your child says “ball”, respond by saying “Ball. Big ball.” Help increase their word length by adding words to what your child says.
- Use correct speech sounds and grammar when talking to your child.
- Use all 5 senses during play (seeing, hearing, touching, tasting and smelling).

Books and language

- Try to read books every day with your child. Reading is one of the best ways to help teach speech, language and listening. It also helps to begin the habit of reading.
- Begin reading as soon as your child is born.
 - At first, read simple books with only a few pictures on the page.
 - Describe and name objects and actions as you read. Help your child point to pictures when you name them.
 - Raise and lower your voice as you read. Use “ooohs” and “ahhhs”.
- Give your child time to respond. When you ask a question, pause to give your child time to think of an answer.
- Your child may want to read the same book many times. As your child gets older, read familiar books and help them name pictures and tell the story.
- Let your child own some books. This is just as important as owning toys.
- Take your child to your local library for story time.
- Remember: how you interact with your child is very important to their development.

Therapist	Date	Time
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Phone number

This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child’s doctor or a member of your child’s healthcare team about specific care of your child.

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