

COMMUNICATION

Communicating with your baby

Speech Pathology

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Communication is much more than talking. Before birth, your baby is developing the building blocks for the listening, speaking, language and social skills he/she will need for communicating with others. A newborn already recognises his/her mother's language. A newborn can also tell the difference between human voices and other sounds in the world around them.

As this diagram shows, communication is more than talking — there are a number of different skills that we gradually learn to help us communicate effectively.



Here are some ways your baby might be communicating with you already:

- Emotions and attachment: smiling and laughing while looking at people they know well (mum or dad). Looking for mum or dad when upset.
- Hearing: turning to sounds they hear.
- Imitation: copying your facial expressions or the sounds you make.
- Speech sounds: cooing (making 'ah-ah', 'ooh-ooh', 'coo' and 'goo' sounds); babbling (making 'ba-ba' or 'da-da' sounds).
- Listening and understanding: a newborn might slightly change his/her facial expression or body movements as you talk to them.
- Attention and behaviour: crying — babies cry to get your attention, when something is wrong, if they need to be held, or if they are overwhelmed.
- Interaction and social skills: making eye contact and looking at things.
- Thinking and playing.
- Gesture and body language: reaching for things they want; making facial expressions.
- Talking: using their voice to get your attention; development of first words.

Ideas to encourage communication

These ideas can naturally become part of your routine. There are multiple communication opportunities throughout the whole day — at bath or play time, during nappy changes, feeding and settling times. Remember, communication is more than talking — use gestures, facial expressions, music and touch to communicate with your baby.

Face-to-face — babies enjoy looking at faces. Be close, but not too close to your baby's face and copy his/her facial expressions (e.g. smiles, grimaces). Exaggerate your facial expressions — your baby might reward you with a smile! Poke out your tongue; make a sound.

If your baby is making **sounds**, try not to interrupt! He/She is trying to tell you something and will appreciate you listening. Make eye contact and listen. This gives your baby a feeling of importance in the world.

Copy the sounds your baby makes. Young babies will make cooing sounds (e.g. 'ee', 'uh', 'oh') before using more complex sounds. They will make other babbling sounds (e.g. 'baba') as they grow older. Copy these sounds, then change the sound to something slightly different such as 'bubu'.

Sing songs and nursery rhymes in your own language. Songs about different parts of the body help your baby learn about different words. Use actions to match the words you sing.

It's never too early to **read** with your baby. Early contact with books helps your baby learn about reading. Rhyming books teach them about the sounds we use in our language. Picture books help develop attention and concentration.

Follow your baby's lead — take interest in and pay attention to the things your baby looks at. Sharing attention is a key building block for communication.

Play games such as 'peek-a-boo'. These games help develop many skills needed for communication and learning.

Play with toys such as rattles and musical toys that make gentle or musical noises. Hold the toy in front of your baby and gently shake it. Wait, and slowly move the toy to one side and shake again. If your baby does not follow the toy, take it back to the middle and wait until she focuses on the toy before trying again. Talk to your baby as you play.

Talk with your baby lots and lots! Gently tell them everything that is happening in the world. He/She will enjoy the sound of your voice. Babies especially respond to high pitched voices (female voices). Make your voice interesting to listen to — use a high voice, a low voice, and a singsong voice. Watch your baby's facial expressions change as you change your voice and intonation.

IMPORTANT

All babies learn different skills at different times. For information about what communication skills to expect in your baby's first 12 months, see the links on the RCH Speech Pathology website.



IMPORTANT

Be patient when communicating with your baby. Some babies need more time than others to respond to our communication. Pausing and giving time between each sound gives time for them to communicate back to you.

For more ideas about your baby's communication, visit the *Baby Cues video* and the *Connecting and Communicating* section of the Raising Children Network website.

If you are concerned about your baby's communication, speak with your maternal and child health nurse or doctor.

