



## Encouraging early communication

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From the moment we are born we communicate through sounds, facial expressions and gestures/body movements. Babies continue to develop communication skills when adults respond to their efforts to “tell” others about what they need or want. This article will explore ways to encourage early communication.

### **Respond to your child's sounds, gestures and body language**

When your child extends their arms to you, pick them up and say something simple like "up." Copy your child's sounds back to him or her. Make eye contact with your child and chat or sing to them when they look at you. This teaches your child the value and effectiveness of communication and will encourage them to continue to develop these skills.

### **Talk and listen to you child**

Remember to make eye contact with your child on their level and give them at least 10 seconds to process and respond to what you're saying. This shows that you want to hear what he or she has to say. To encourage further language skills, ask open-ended questions such who, what, where, why, and when.

### **Tell stories and read together**

Cuddle together for quiet time with a book, you may wish to make this a part of the bed time routine. Let your child choose the books. The greater his or her interest in the book, the more attentive and delightful your time together will be. Studies show that lifelong readers are individuals who enjoyed reading as a child. Encourage your older baby to turn the pages and to point to what they can see. Ask your older toddler how the characters might be feeling and what might happen next.

### **Narrate what you do throughout the day**

This helps your child connect words with objects and actions. “You are in the bathtub. Let’s wash you’re arms, legs, and tummy. Rubber Duck is having a bath too. Squeeze the sponge” etc.

### **Build your child’s vocabulary**

As you play together say things like “You are brushing your dolly’s hair. Dolly has long hair”. For verbal children, add a word onto a word they can say for example if you are playing with the cars on a mat and you child says “car” you could say “car go” “car stop” “car fast” etc. demonstrating these actions with the car.

### **Develop your child’s understanding of language**

Provide plenty of opportunities to discuss the words for emotional language and experiences for example “I think you’re feeling sad because Grandma had to go home.” You can extend this depending on your child’s developmental stage linking the emotion to the physical response such as “I think you’re feeling angry because you’re stomping your feet”.

### **Make simple requests**

You can give one step directions such as, “Get the ball.” Once your child can follow one step instructions you can begin to give two-step instruction for example, “Get your shoes and bring them to me” or “Put dolly in bed”. Be sure you have your child’s attention first, by using their name and looking directly at them, you may wish to get down on their eye level.