

Stage One: Ages 0 to 3 Years (Home)

TOP TIPS FOR HELPING BABIES WITH THEIR SPEECH DEVELOPMENT

There is a lot of research that has shown talking to our babies is very important for not only their oral language development but also brain development, but how do we chat to babies?

Not all parents think to engage in this kind of communication with their babies, bear in mind that the quality of the conversation matters more for a child's development than quantity of words.

- When you are speaking to a child, especially babies under two, **eye contact** is very important. This is how children bond and it develops the part of their brain that builds attachment and empathy.
- **Birth to six months.** A baby's attention probably won't be captured with normal adult speech. Talking to them tenderly using exaggerated sounds and facial expressions which will lay the foundation for language learning and resiliency in these early months.
- **Six to 18 months.** At this age, children can understand a considerable number of words. They can, for example, point to their nose with a finger around six months before being able to say the word "nose." Children of this age learn the most from interactions focused on the present, such as pointing out objects or pictures of objects.
- Using animal sounds like Maa, maa, or baa baa is the **start of consonant articulation**. You can extend this by singing Old MacDonald. Or by reading books with animals in them and making the sound yourself.
- **Watch their hands.** When it comes to a 1-year-old's vocabulary, they understand a lot more words than they can actually say. When your toddler waves at you, chime in with "Bye-bye!" or when they point at something, ask, "Do you want the cup?" You can also play games with gestures, like pat-a-cake, or make motions with your hands when you sing "The Wheels on the Bus" to help connect the words with the actions.
- **Piggyback words.** Around 18 months, toddlers start using two-word combos to communicate. Usually, they'll put together an action plus an object, like 'drink juice,' or 'read book. You can add one or two more: If she says, "Ball," you say, "Big ball" or "Throw your ball." This way you are not correcting their speech but modelling or extending more language.

- **Follow their lead.** If your child is curious about something, they'll want to know the words that go with it. Pay attention to what's catching their interest, and talk about what you can see: "That's a cute white cat by the tree."
- **Change your pitch.** Toddlers are starting to add inflection to their voice to ask questions like, 'Out?' They're also learning that you talk softly when you're indoors and you can be louder outside. Play with funny voices—such as a gruff bear voice or a squeaky mouse one —so your child can copy you and practice different sounds and pitches.
- **Keep it interactive.** Toddlers love music, and singing is a great way to build language. Sing plenty of simple songs, especially ones that rhyme ("One, Two, Buckle My Shoe") or make lots of sounds ("Old MacDonald"). But don't fall into the trap of plopping them down in front of the TV, right now it's very important they can see your facial expressions as that is part of language. What children really listen to and respond to is real human voices and interaction.
- **18 to 36 months.** As a child's verbal and cognitive skills develop, parents can start having more stimulating conversations with their children. Try asking questions like "what" and "where." It's at this age that parents should try to use the biggest range of different words.
- **Use real words.** Although it's okay if your child calls a bottle "ba ba," you should use the proper words to make sure that you're not always talking down to your toddler. "Parents need to stay one step ahead of their child's stage," says Stuart Teplin, M.D., a developmental and behavioural paediatrician in Concord, North Carolina. By using real words instead of baby talk, you're helping to expand their vocabulary.

