

Helping your baby learn to talk

Your baby is born ready to learn. From the moment they open their eyes they are learning and discovering things around them.

Your baby's brain grows faster in the first two years than at any other time so all the encouragement you give them is very important.

Your baby doesn't need anything complicated from you to help him/her develop, just lots of love and attention.

They are interacting with you from the moment they are born, crying to tell you they are hungry, uncomfortable or just wanting a cuddle from you.

From about six weeks, those lovely baby sounds begin – gurgling and cooing noises such as 'ahh' and 'ooh'. These are usually linked with smiles and excited movements of the arms and legs.

By six weeks your baby will recognise your voice and by four months will turn their head to find you when they hear you coming. They will also respond to the tune in your voice, being calmed by a soothing voice and joining in with sing-song chatter, "who's a cheeky girl then.....cuchy, cushy, coo".

How to encourage your baby

When your baby is cooing and 'chatting', encourage them by talking back to them. When they say 'ooh' and 'ahh' you say the same sounds back to them and see if they stop, watch you and 'reply' in their own way.

Add some new noises such as bababa, mamama, gagaga, looking and smiling at them all the time.

You may find that there is a particular time of the day when your baby plays more with sounds and noises e.g. when kicking around on the changing mat or splashing in the bath. Make those ten minutes your special 'talk-time' together, when you can share in those noises and interactions together.

By far the most important thing to help your baby learn is making lots of eye contact and talking to them. Even a tiny baby is picking up the tune of your voice and storing information that will be used later as they learn to speak.

Talk to your baby in sentences because they will respond to the 'up and down' of your voice. Use lots of fairly short sentences, with pauses in between. This helps them get the idea of taking turns in conversations and very soon they will begin to fill some of the pauses with smiles and gurgles – their 'answers' to you.

Games to play

1. Babies love listening to any songs you can sing, in or out of tune! Nursery rhymes are ideal e.g. Twinkle twinkle little star, Baa Baa black sheep, Humpty Dumpty.
2. Tickling games such as Round and round the garden or this little piggy went to market.
3. Play 'peek-a-boo'.
4. Shake a quiet noisemaker while your baby is cooing and stop when they stop. They will soon learn that they are making the noisemaker work.
5. Look at books – even very young babies enjoy the shared experience of sitting with you and looking at bright pictures of everyday things such as animals or toys...the simpler the better! (Books made of board and cloth is best as they are made to cope with being chewed and pulled about!)
6. Go out every day, to the shops, the park, your local parent and baby group visit friends or just go for a walk. Point to and name things that you see.

When doing all of these things remember to use plenty of physical contact with your baby, look at them and most of all, enjoy yourself!