



The Foundation Years at Home

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Communicating with your baby

Babies are born with an in built desire to communicate with their parents and other care givers as they rely on them to meet their physical and emotional needs. Although they are not able to speak babies can communicate very effectively in other ways.

You will find that your baby uses body language and facial expression to communicate what he or she is thinking. Often he will mimic the expressions which you use when talking to him.

This is how he builds up a range of gestures and facial movements to communicate his thoughts and emotions.

The importance of conversations

During the first twelve months of your baby's life the area of the brain responsible for language develops rapidly. During this time the more opportunities a baby has to take part in conversations and to hear songs and rhymes the better the connections will be in the language centre of the brain. Repetition of words increases the connections between the nerves in the brain to create a complex network which helps to process language efficiently.

The link between sound and meaning develops progressively in the second 6 months of life. Your baby's 'receptive language' – what he can understand - develops faster than his 'expressive language'.

This means he can understand simple instructions before he is able to speak. Around 12 months there is the magic moment when your baby will say his first word.

Being able to communicate verbally is a huge step forward in your baby's developing independence, enabling him to communicate and express his feelings.

Ideas to try

- Take time to know your baby's likes and dislikes, rhythms and routines. Use this information to help you have meaningful conversations with your baby during the day.
- Try hard to find time during the day to have one to one conversations with your baby. Choose a quiet spot, make eye contact and have a conversation. Talk to your baby and then pause to give him or her time to respond.
- Make exaggerated movements of the lips, face and eyebrows as this will make the conversation easier for your baby to follow. These will often be copied by your baby as she responds to you.
- Try letting your baby lead the conversation while you respond to his or her eye movements and facial expressions.
- During the course of the day give your baby the opportunity to be in lots of different places – on the floor, sitting up in a high chair, being held up to look out of the window or being out of doors. Place yourself at the same level as your baby and talk about all the different things you can both see.
- The more spoken language your baby hears the easier it will be for her to make connections between words and objects. This builds the foundation for language development.
- Listen together to music, rhymes and song, encouraging your baby to listen and respond to the sounds she is hearing.