

Helping your Baby to Develop Language

The main thing you can do to help your baby develop good communication and language skills is to talk to your baby as much as you can. Babies learn to talk by hearing other people talking.

- Speak face-to-face when talking to your baby – babies watch adults' mouths to match shapes to sounds.
- Speak slowly and clearly – this helps to train neurons in your baby's brain to identify specific sounds.
- Repeat words – this strengthens the neural pathways used for language.
- Provide feedback – if your baby says 'ma-ma-ma' answer her attempts at speech with 'Yes, mama is over there.'
- Talk naturally in a running commentary about what you are doing. 'I'm going to change your nappy here on this mat. Here are the cotton wipes. This is the powder...' allow pauses for your baby to register what you are saying and 'talk' back.
- Have your baby in your arms or nearby at all times – when you are talking to other adults they can listen. Involve him in the conversation.
- Repeat sounds your baby makes by herself or turn the sounds she make into words. For example, say 'bang, bang' if she is banging. Follow her gaze, if she is looking at a tree say 'that is a tree'. Go over and touch it.
- Sing nursery rhymes and lullabies.
- Listen to different kinds of music together. When your child uses a word, add another one, extending his vocabulary. If he says 'cat', say 'black cat'.
- Listen together and name the sounds you hear around you. For example indoors you may hear doors creaking open, the clink of cutlery at mealtimes, the sound of a CD, babies crying or water running in a tap. Outdoors you may hear cars passing, the wind whistling, a plane overhead or bees buzzing.

