

Communicating with your child (0-3 years)

How babies and toddlers communicate

Even though your newborn baby does not have words yet, she communicates with you through crying, eye contact and listening. Later on, she will coo, smile, laugh, make more sounds and move her body to communicate with you. As a toddler, she will begin to use more words and build up to short sentences and simple questions. Talking with your child does not have to be a big deal – just chatting about everyday things is a great start.

Why is it important to communicate with your child?

From birth, your baby absorbs a huge amount of information about words and talking, just from listening and watching you talk. So, talking with your baby or toddler helps her language and communication development.

The more you talk with your baby or toddler, the better. This is because when she hears more words, it helps to improve her understanding of language, and increases the number and variety of words she can understand and use.

And it is not just about better language skills. Talking with your baby helps her brain develop and can help her do better at school when she's older.

Talking about emotions, like happiness or frustration, helps her to learn to express her feelings. And when you look into her eyes and use facial expressions as you talk, it helps her learn the connection between words and feelings.

By communicating back and forth with your child in a warm and gentle way, you are also creating and sharing experiences together, which strengthens your relationship and helps her learn more about the world at the same time.

Tips to help your child communicate

Any time you are with your child is a good opportunity to communicate. This could be when you are changing nappies, having lunch together, travelling in the car or train, pushing the pram or just pottering around the house – you do not need to make a special time for it.

Here are some ideas to help your child communicate through **everyday interactions**:

- . Chat to your baby about the things you are doing around the house, even if you think they are boring – for example, 'Daddy's vacuuming the carpet to get rid of the dust that makes you sneeze'.
- . Repeat your toddler's attempts at words to encourage two-way conversation – for example, if she says 'mama' you could say 'mama' back to her.

Communication goes both ways, so when you are talking, do not forget to **tune into your child**. For example:

- Notice what your child is paying attention to and talk about that. For example, if she's playing with blocks, talk about the blocks.
- Listen to what your child is trying to communicate. Even if she is not using words yet, ask her questions and build on her efforts. For example, if your child is pointing at a dog, say, 'It's a fluffy white dog. What do you think he's going to do now?'
- Use natural pauses. Your baby will eventually fill in these pauses when her language develops. This also teaches her 'give and take' in a conversation.
- Know when to stop. If your child starts to look tired or restless, or gets grumpy, do not force her to keep listening. Pick another time, when she is ready for a chat.

Try these ideas to **encourage your child to listen** when you are talking:

- Talk to your child about things she is likely to be interested in – for example, what grandpa might be doing today, a story you have read together, or something that is happening outside.
- Think about how you talk as well as what you talk about – use lots of expression in your voice and your face to make your conversation engaging.
- Explain new or complex words and build on them by using lots of descriptive words. For example, 'We're going to see the paediatrician – that's a special doctor who knows all about babies and children'.
- Read, tell stories, sing songs and make rhymes. These are all great ways to introduce new sounds and words in an enjoyable way for your child.



Recommended Reads by the National Library Board

For some suggestions on rhymes, click [here](#) to download a booklet on rhymes!

Recommended Reads

- [Touch and lift first 100 words](#)
- [ABC baby signs](#)
- [Baby Signs](#)

Engage your child with simple activities at home! Check out some of these things you can do together:

- [Get Well Soon](#)