

the early years toolkit

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Baby talk

Babies start to learn about language, speaking and communication as soon as they are born. Straightaway they take in all your words, tunes and messages through body language, facial expression and tone of voice and their noises start to mean basic things

How does my baby learn about talking?

Babies need to be shown things and told about them. If they experience lots of activities then they begin to understand what is going on. Later on they will be able to say what things are called, what they are for and what we can do with them, for example

- Baby experiences bath-time, you give a simple commentary on what you are using and what is happening
- Baby understands bath-time and can anticipate a bath
- Baby starts to say a first word like 'bath', 'water'

What can I do to help?

Be face to face with your baby when you can. Communication is about people connecting and learning the rules about taking turns. Your baby needs to see your face to pick up on your facial expression and body language as well as hearing what you are saying.

Think about background noise. Having the television, DVD and music on constantly makes it hard for your baby to focus on your voice. Turn them all off for some of the time to let your baby concentrate on you, your voice and the sounds you make with your mouth. This helps your baby to develop listening and copying skills.

Talk to your baby whatever you are doing, long before you can expect them to talk back. They will tune into your voice and the sounds and words you use and these will eventually be meaningful to them. They will pick up your tone of voice from very early days.

How do babies progress from making noises to using words?

Babbling is your baby's first attempt at making sounds and words. Copy your baby and see if you can keep the noises going for longer. Take

turns to make noises. Some noises might mean a word. Is “dadadadada” your baby’s first attempt at “daddy”? You say “daddy” and your baby will know you have understood a first word.

What about using dummies?

Dummies can be useful to sooth a restless baby or when your baby is settling to sleep but try not to let your baby suck on a dummy all of the time. Babies need to experiment with lots of tongue and lip movements and the dummy may get in the way. If your baby is awake and interested then remove their dummy so they can join in the conversation.

Remember

Learning to understand, talk and be sociable is about people interacting. The television and video are fine some of the time, but they can’t respond to babies. People can respond so you are the best way of helping your baby to learn to talk.