

Talking to your baby: How early communication begins



Highlights

- Babies respond to familiar voices from birth, even before speaking
- Cooing and babbling are key parts of early language development
- Talking throughout the day helps build strong language skills
- Babies can understand a few words by six months
- Speaking multiple languages to your baby supports future bilingualism

In This Article

- Why your words matter from day one
- Ways babies express themselves early
- Supporting first attempts at speech
- Helping your baby develop speech in the first year
- Building communication through reading and songs
- How feeding supports speech muscles
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- Watching for early signs of language development
- The importance of hearing in learning to talk
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Why your words matter from day one

Talking to your baby from the start helps lay the foundation for communication. Babies love the sound of familiar voices and benefit from early interaction. Every time you speak, you're helping your baby build language skills-even if they can't speak yet.

Ways babies express themselves early

Long before they speak, babies are already communicating:

Crying is their first way of expressing needs and feelings
They respond to your voice, tone, and touch
Over time, they start using gestures like pointing or moving toward something they want

Responding to these signals builds trust and teaches babies that communication gets results.

Supporting first attempts at speech

By around eight weeks, babies start experimenting with sounds like cooing or gurgling. You can support this phase by:

Mimicking their sounds and facial expressions
Having "conversations" where you respond to their vocalizations
Making eye contact and smiling during interactions

These actions encourage turn-taking, a key part of future speech.

Helping your baby develop speech in the first year

Talking to your baby throughout the day is one of the best ways to boost their language skills. Try:

Describing what you're doing during routines like changing or feeding
Repeating common words slowly and clearly

Speaking in more than one language if you are bilingual-this helps them hear and learn different sounds

Daily talk builds vocabulary and familiarity with language patterns.

Building communication through reading and songs

Books, songs, and rhymes make learning language fun and interactive. You can:

- Read simple books with bright pictures
- Use animated voices and expressions
- Sing nursery rhymes and familiar tunes

These playful moments help babies connect words with emotions and rhythm.

How feeding supports speech muscles

Sucking and swallowing help develop the muscles babies need for speech. When your baby starts eating solids-typically around six months-it also strengthens their mouth, jaw, and tongue for future talking.

Five helpful tips for everyday talking

- Reduce background noise so your baby can focus on your voice
- Be patient-language learning takes time
- Notice when your baby needs a break \ (like when hungry or tired\)
- Pause during "conversations" to allow them to respond
- Aim for many short, relaxed interactions during the day

These small moments help build strong language habits over time.

Watching for early signs of language development

By their first birthday, babies usually:

- Respond to familiar words, including their name
- Make a range of sounds
- Mimic voices or simple words they hear

Language skills grow gradually, and each baby develops at their own pace.

The importance of hearing in learning to talk

Hearing is essential for speech development. You can support this by:

Watching how your baby reacts to sounds and voices

Checking if they startle at loud noises

Noticing if they turn toward sounds

If you have any concerns, talk to a professional about hearing tests.

When to seek professional advice

It's a good idea to speak to a healthcare provider if:

Your baby isn't making sounds by several months

They don't respond to voices or noises

You have concerns about hearing or speech development

Early support makes a big difference in long-term communication success.

Tools and Assistance

Monitor hearing milestones and follow up if you have concerns

Talk to your baby during everyday routines like feeding or dressing

Use expressive faces and tones when speaking

Read stories, sing songs, and repeat favorite words

Respond to your baby's sounds to build early turn-taking skills

Limit background noise so your voice stands out