



SECTION 6

COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR BABY OR TODDLER

Every arm or leg wave, every coo, babble or smile – these are your baby's ways of communicating with you. It is important that you always try to respond – by talking, with touch, eye contact, gestures, and facial expressions.

This early communication is how your baby starts to learn about the world and their place in it. Through communication we become part of society.

When your baby has a hearing loss, they may not respond so much at first. This can be discouraging, but it is important to keep trying as your baby will be taking lots in and this is extremely valuable to their development.

FAQ: I've been told my baby is 'deaf' – does that mean my baby can't hear any sounds?

It's unlikely your baby will not be able to hear anything at all. The word 'deaf' refers to all types and levels of hearing loss. Your Audiologist or Advisor on Deaf Children (AODC) can explain the results of your baby's hearing tests and tell you what sounds your baby can hear and which ones may be difficult to hear. Your Audiologist may even be able to arrange a 'simulation' in the audiology clinic so you can hear some sounds at the same level as your baby would hear them.

LANGUAGE

A child's brain is programmed to learn the foundations of language in their first six years. The first three years are the most critical.

Language is not the same as speech. Language is made of the words (or signs) we use in our heads – we think in "language". We can only communicate in spoken language if we can think in words and their associated sounds.

Without being able to hear people speaking it is very difficult to learn the structure of a spoken language and therefore later also learn to read. Deaf children need to learn to understand written language, and pathways to doing this can vary. This means you will need to explore and learn about the best pathway for your child to learn language structures.

The earlier you start communicating with your child – any method of communication – the better. This may be using speech (with the help of hearing aids or a cochlear implant), visual means such as sign language, or both.



Nuie, Nuie Jnr and Luisa

Baby sign language

Whether hearing or deaf, babies can be taught basic signing so they can communicate before they would normally start to speak. Several books and DVDs are available through shops and resource centres. Deaf Aotearoa New Zealand (DANZ) supports a DVD, *Teach Your Baby or Toddler NZSL*, which teaches parents an easy way to communicate with babies and toddlers. This is funded by Ministry of Education and Victoria University. It is available through the DANZ website and through AODCs.

Hearing with aids or a cochlear implant

The aim of hearing aids and cochlear implants is to make speech audible and comfortable. For most babies, early intervention should be in place by six months and will enable them to develop speech and language normally.

You can make this easier for your baby by turning off the TV and radio and putting their aids on as much as possible. Talk to your child in the same way you would to any child.

Even if your baby with a hearing aid can't hear all the sounds of speech, always use it. Babies usually adapt to listening through a hearing aid very quickly.

Ideas to help your baby develop communication skills

- Try to stay within a metre of your baby as their focal length at this age is about the distance from their chin to their elbow.
- Capture their attention first. Make sure they are looking, and keep eye contact with them. Make sure they can see your face, and hands if using sign language or other visual cues. If they are already looking at something, give them time before asking for their attention.
- Play games. For babies, games such as "Peek-a-boo!" are always popular. Once a baby understands the game, they'll respond.
- Take turns. Watch them and when they finish, take a turn. Then pause again to allow your child to take a turn.
- Use gestures, point to pictures, or act out a story.
- Make communication fun. If the going gets tough, take a break and try again later.
- Keep their interest by pulling faces to show happiness, concern, surprise, sadness and excitement. If speaking, vary your pitch to keep their attention – it helps if you bring their hand to your throat and allow them to feel your voice. If they look away, a wave or gentle nudge can draw them back into your game.
- Hold your baby about 25 cms away from you. Now, stick out your tongue. Did they try to copy you? Try different mouth movements.
- Follow your child's eyes to see what interests them, and respond immediately.
- Repetition is a strong key to learning. Repeat the same things over and over. Use objects, pictures or hand gestures to show what is meant.

"On Christmas day 2011, Emily gave me a gift that will never be forgotten. It will never break, wear out, lose its value or be lost in time. My baby girl, at eight months old, signed 'mummy'."
Corina, mother of baby Emily



Communicating with your toddler

- Talk to your toddler about the things around them, and relate what you say to them. For example: "That boy has red hair, you have black hair, and I have brown hair."
- Start a scrapbook about favourite people, places or activities. Talk about the contents and your child's associated experiences. Add photos, pictures, tickets, labels, anything!
- Sign language users have a physical language they can play with – try signing on paper, or on your child's arm or their tummy. If you don't know some signs, don't panic. Use gestures instead as communication is the important thing.
- Fingerspell – young children can understand fingerspelling from an early age. Give it a try!

Ideas to help develop language

- Let your child help make a shopping list. Communicate about what needs to be bought and why.
- Let them see captions on television programmes, or watch captioned movies. Many DVDs have a caption function you can turn on – it's never too early to get children used to seeing captions.
- Use pictures in magazines, recipe books, TV guides, and books to support your child to make choices of activities, foods, toys, and other interests.
- If you eat out, bring home picture menus to share with your child. They can order for themselves next time, or young children can point at pictures to request what they want.

Tips for talking

- Talk to your child when you're playing together.
- Have fun with nursery rhymes and songs, especially those with actions.
- If your child has a hearing aid, encourage them to wear it and listen to different sounds, especially those which are close. This will help listening skills.
- Gain your child's attention when you want to talk, and make sure that they can see you clearly. Try to make sure there is light on your face and that your faces are on the same level.
- Listen carefully and give your child time to communicate. Take turns.
- Always respond in some way when they say something.
- Limit TV time. Try to watch TV together so you can talk about what happens.
- Keep background noise (for example radios and music) to a minimum.
- When you are talking to your baby stop and give them time to respond.
- Try talking about what you're doing throughout the day – when you're bathing or feeding your baby or changing their nappy.



Ideas to help develop early reading skills

Reading with your child is another fun way to boost talking. Talking and listening to young children helps promote both social and reading skills. Children love this one-on-one attention from their parent or other close adult. The following ideas apply to any young child.

How to read

Start with waterproof card or lift-the-flap books. Black and white pictures are especially good for young babies. Communicate about the title and pictures first, and then go to the written words. Don't be limited by the words, expand on the book's ideas.

Follow their lead

Let your child guide you through the story if they want to. Young children can turn the pages while the pictures are briefly described. If they race through the pages, let them. Repeat the story if they want it.

Connect with the book

Draw on similarities or differences within the book, which the child can relate to through their own experiences in the real world.

Be dramatic

Play with the words. Exaggerate to show the different characters. Act out the story – you can even use props such as soft toys.

Teach good reading habits

Show good reading habits every day. If possible, try setting a target of reading for 15 minutes daily including weekends. Bedtime is often a good time to read with children, and a good way to settle them after a busy day.

Encourage a love of books

Swap books with other parents or join the local library and visit it regularly. Choose books that can be enjoyed by both the parent and the child. As they get older, encourage them to choose their own books.

Be a role model

Let your child see that reading is part of a parent's daily life as well.

Use every opportunity

Read words in the environment around you: shop names, billboards and street signs are all reading opportunities.

Engage your child in everyday news on TV and in newspapers, and talk with them about items of interest.

Early intervention

Early intervention is the name given to education programmes designed for children who need extra help with their early development. A number of organisations provide early intervention services (funded by Ministry of Education) for children from birth to school age. These include Ministry of Education, Northern Cochlear Implant Programme, Southern Cochlear Implant Programme, and the Hearing House.

The earlier a child receives services to address the effects of hearing loss, the more time there is to influence and develop their learning.

Early intervention staff can include:

- Speech-Language Therapists (SLTs)
- Early Intervention (EI) teachers
- Psychologists
- Auditory verbal therapists
- Cochlear implant habilitationists
- Advisors on Deaf Children (AODC)
- Resource Teachers: Deaf (RTD)
- Resource Teacher: Vision (RTV)
- Family counsellors
- Kaitakawaenga (Māori liaison advisors)
- Education Support Workers.

Early intervention teams work with families/whānau, educators, and specialists from other agencies to strengthen and extend children's educational learning, and to ensure they have access to the early childhood curriculum, Te Whāriki.

Songs and rhymes

Young children love songs and rhymes, and children with a hearing loss are no different. Here are the words and actions to Row, Row, Row Your Boat.

Sit opposite your child and hold their hands, or put your baby on your lap facing you 'Row' backwards and forwards. Remember to squeak, scream, and roar when you see the mouse, crocodile or lion!

Row, row, row your boat
Gently down the stream
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily
Life is but a dream

Row, row, row your boat
Gently up the creek
If you see a little mouse

Don't forget to squeak!
Row, row, row your boat
Gently down the stream
If you see a crocodile
Don't forget to scream!
Row, row, row your boat
Gently to the shore
If you see a lion
Don't forget to roar!



For an online music soundtrack of many children's songs go to:
www.wordsforlife.org.uk/songs