

Learning to Talk



Learning to talk is one of the most difficult and important steps that your toddler will take.

Talking helps them to make sense of the world, to ask for what they need and to be able to get on with other people. If you think about how difficult it is for adults to learn a different language you can get some idea of what it is like for an infant to learn to talk from having no language at all. Different children learn to talk at different rates.

Steps in learning to talk

The early months

Long before they can speak, babies are listening to their parents and carers. They begin to make little noises and sounds which come before speech. If parents and carers imitate these, it is as if they are talking to the baby. This is the beginning of your baby learning to talk.

By responding to your baby's needs when she cries, you show that you have heard her and that she matters. This is the beginning of communication.

8-12 months

- * The early little noises turn into babbling e.g. 'Da-da-dada' and 'Ma-ma-ma-ma'.
- * Babies are beginning to learn what some simple words mean even though they cannot say them, e.g. 'Mummy, Bottle, No'.
- * There may be one or two single words.
- * Babies wave 'bye-bye' when asked.
- * They obey simple requests such as 'Give me the ball'.

12-18 months

- * There is much babbling in the children's own jargon.
- * The first single words appear eg 'No, Dad, Dog'.
- * Children can point to things they know when they are asked to.
- * Children know their own names and respond to them.

18 months to 2 years

- * 18 month-olds can know and use six or more words. Two year-olds may

have 100 or more words. Many of the words may be unclear but the parent or carer can tell what is meant.

- * Two-year olds can say their name.
- * They can ask for simple things that they need e.g. 'Drink'.
- * Children start to join words together e.g. 'Daddy home', 'All gone'.
- * They copy the last part of sentences.
- * They try out different speech sounds and make mistakes.

What parents can do

You can play a fun and active role in helping your child learn to talk right from the start by talking to your baby and imitating her sounds, telling her what you are doing and reading stories. As your toddler starts talking, listen to your child, don't correct their speech and let them finish what they are saying. Read stories, talk about the pictures in books together, sing songs and take them to the library. It helps to get down to eye level when you are teaching your child a new word and if they have older brothers and sisters, make sure they get a chance to talk.



Although all children learn to talk at different rates, you should be concerned if your child:

- doesn't react to loud noises by the time she is one month old.
- doesn't turn her head to a noise or voice by three months of age. Hearing problems often cause speech difficulties.
- doesn't start to make single sounds, e.g. 'ba ba' by eight or nine months.
- is not starting to say single words by 12 months.
- doesn't understand simple instructions by two years.

If you have any concerns about your child's speech or hearing, talk to your local child health nurse or your doctor. Your child may need to see a speech pathologist.