Learning to talk is one of the most important steps for your child. Talking helps him make sense of his world, ask for what he needs and get along with other people.

Just like other skills, your child will develop language and speech at his own speed.

**Steps in learning to talk**

**The early months**

**Crying is your baby's first communication.**

By responding to her needs when she cries, you're showing her that you've heard her, and that she matters.

Your baby will also be listening to you and watching how you talk.

At around 7 to 8 weeks, she will start to make little noise which come before speech.

If you listen and respond to these she will coo and make simple sounds.

**This is the start of your baby learning to talk.**

**8 to 12 months**

- The early little noises turn into babbling – ‘da-da-da-da’ and ‘ma-ma-ma-ma’.
- Your baby is beginning to learn what some simple words mean even though he can’t say them – ‘mummy’, ‘daddy’, ‘no’.
- He might wave ‘bye-bye’ when asked.
- He’ll start to respond to simple requests like ‘Give me the ball’.
- He’ll also know his own name and react when you say it.

**12 to 18 months**

- She’ll do a lot of babbling, and start saying single words – ‘no’, ‘dad’, ‘dog’.
- She can point to things that she knows when you ask her to.

**18 months to 2 years**

18 month olds can know and use between 6 and 20 words.

Two year olds may say 50 words and understand many more.

- Many of the words may be unclear but you can tell what he means.
- Your 2 year old can say his name.
- He can ask for simple things – ‘drink’.
- He’ll start to join words together – ‘daddy home’, ‘all gone’.
- He’ll copy the last part of sentences.
- He’ll try out different speech sounds and make mistakes.

**3 to 4 years**

- Your child will begin to ask ‘what’ and ‘why’ questions.
- She’ll use sentences with lots of different words.
- She can begin to separate the truth from make-believe.
- She can talk about yesterday, now and tomorrow, and know what they mean.
- You can understand her speech most of the time.
- She might talk to herself while doing things.
- She can also learn and join in simple rhymes and songs.

**4 to 5 years**

By now, your child will be able to adjust his language to suit the situation. For example, he’ll talk differently to you than to his friends.

- He’ll start to ask ‘when’ questions.
- He can talk about imaginary situations – ‘I hope…’.
- He’ll still mix truth and make-believe, and like to tell stories.
- He can hold conversations with his friends and parents.
- If you teach him, he’ll be able to say his name, age and address.
- Four year olds enjoy making up words for fun and using toilet words – ‘poo’, ‘bum’.
- His speech will be clear but he still might not be saying ‘th’, ‘r’, ‘z’, ‘s’ and ‘v’.
What parents can do

- Talk to your baby right from birth and imitate her sounds.
- Name things and talk about what you are doing. Use simple words and sentences at first.
- Read books with her.
- Have conversations with her every day.
- Be interested when your child is talking to you. Don’t interfere or correct her.
- Answer questions simply and clearly.
- Allow her time to get out what she wants to say.
- Talk about pictures in books and name things in the pictures.
- Sing songs and read rhymes.
- Take her to the local library and read stories to her. Maybe you can borrow or buy the ones she particularly likes.
- Give a younger child a chance to talk without being interrupted by her older brothers and sisters.
- If your child is stumbling over words because she’s excited, suggest that she tells you slowly. Then listen to her carefully.
- Get down to her eye level when teaching your child a new word so she can see your lips and hear the word clearly.
- For children with a severe hearing loss, it is important we find this out as early as possible – before 6 months.

Talk to your doctor or nurse if your child:
- doesn't react to loud noises by the time he's 1 month old
- doesn't turn his head to a noise or voice by 3 months.
  Hearing problems often cause speech difficulties
- doesn't start to make single sounds – ‘ba ba’ – by 8 or 9 months
- doesn't babble or make other sounds when someone talks to him by 12 months
- is not starting to say single words by 12 months. (The words do not have to be clear, but they need to be used for the same thing each time – ‘mmm' for mummy or ‘bo-bo' for bottle.)
- doesn't understand simple instructions by 2 years
- frequently repeats sounds or part-words – ‘Wh-wh-where’s my ba-ba-ball?’ – lengthens sounds or gets stuck on words – ‘m-m-m-m’ or ‘da-a-a-a-ad’
- seems embarrassed or worried when he speaks.

If you are ever worried about your child’s speech, talk to your child health nurse or your doctor. Your child may need to see a speech therapist. Your nurse or doctor can help with this.

Summary

- Language development needs listening and talking.
- Talking with your baby from birth is important.
- Use simple language.
- Sit or kneel down so you are on your child’s level when he’s talking to you.
- Spend time reading simple stories and rhymes, looking at picture books and singing songs.
- Help children to notice road signs and billboards.
- Learning language is important. It should also be fun.

For more information contact

- HealthyWA
  www.healthywa.wa.gov.au
- Local child health nurse
- Local family doctor
- Ngala Parenting Line (8am–8pm everyday)
  (08) 9368 9368 (Outside metro 1800 111 546)
  www.ngala.com.au
- Raising Children Network
  www.raisingchildren.net.au
- Kidsafe WA (8.30am–5pm weekdays)
  (08) 9340 8509 (Outside metro 1800 802 244)
  www.kidsafewa.com.au
- Red Nose
  rednose.com.au

We’ve used ‘he’ and ‘she’ in turn – please change to suit your child.

This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with a disability.