

# Talk to your baby in your own language

The best way to help your child learn to talk is to talk to him as much as possible in your own language - it doesn't have to be English. That way, your child will learn to talk confidently, and will be ready to learn English when he starts at nursery or school.

- Talk to your baby in your own language about what you're doing together – when you're bathing or feeding your baby, or changing her nappy.
- Have fun with rhymes, poems and songs in your own language.
- Tell your child stories in your language. Encourage him to join in with the storytelling.
- Try to find books written in your language for your child, or try making your own.
- Encourage your child to play with children who speak the same language as she does.
- Don't laugh or tease your child because of his accent or if he makes mistakes.
- Talk to your child about what she did at playgroup or nursery in your language. If she uses English words repeat what she said using your language. But do not correct her or make her use your language.
- Help your child feel proud of your language. If he speaks more than one language, teach him the names of the languages.



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Quick tips may be photocopied. For more information visit [www.talktoyourbaby.org.uk](http://www.talktoyourbaby.org.uk)  
Talk To Your Baby is an initiative of the National Literacy Trust.

Reference: *Bilingual Children: a guide for parents and carers* (1994), Foufou Savitzky, South Bank University: London

# Talking with your baby

**Learning to talk is one of the most important and complex skills your child will accomplish. It seems to happen naturally, but in fact you have a very important role to play. The more you talk to your baby, the more you enable her to become a good talker and a confident, happy child.**

- Talk about what you're doing throughout the day – when you're bathing or feeding your baby, or changing her nappy.
- Talk about the things you see on the way to the shops, or at the supermarket. Try to talk about the things your child shows an interest in.
- Talk in the language that you know best. It doesn't have to be English.
- Look at your baby as you talk and give him time to respond to your chatter.
- Answer your baby's noises and babbles.
- Cuddle up together and read a favourite book or talk about the pictures.



- Have fun with nursery rhymes and songs, especially those with actions.
- Listen carefully and give your toddler time to finish talking.
- If your toddler says something incorrectly, say it back the right way e.g. "Goggy bited it." "Yes, the dog bit it, didn't he."
- Try to watch TV together so you can talk about what happens.



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# Dummies and talking

**Babies like to suck, so dummies can help soothe at bedtime or when your baby is tired or cross. But regular and extended use of a dummy can create problems with your child's speech.**

- Try to wean your child away from dummies, preferably by 12 months.
- Make a clean break – throw away the dummy over a weekend, or at a time when you have support. Most babies and toddlers will fret for no more than two or three days.
- Dummies prevent babies from babbling – an important step in learning to talk, so only use them at set times, like bedtime.
- When your baby cries he's trying to tell you something, so try to find out what's troubling him first, and use the dummy as a last resort.
- Never dip your baby's dummy into anything sweet. This can cause tooth decay.



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- Remember, learning to talk can be tricky so toddlers need lots of practice. A dummy will discourage your toddler from chatting with you, which she needs to do to develop her language skills.
- If your toddler is still using a dummy, always ask him to take it out before you talk to each other.



# Playing with your baby

**Play is the main way that babies and toddlers learn about the world. With your help, it's also a wonderful way to support their language development.**

- As a parent, you are your child's best playmate so try to spend time every day playing together.
- Newborns love physical play, especially when you gently tickle their face or count their fingers and toes.
- When your baby gets a little older and stronger, offer her lots of toys or things that are safe to go into her mouth, and talk about the objects for her.
- Make lots of play sounds to go with what's happening, like "brmm, brmm" as you push a car along. That way, your child will hear different speech sounds and learn that listening to voices is fun.
- Your baby will love hearing the same little rhymes and stories, and playing games like peek-a-boo, over and over again.




- You don't need lots of toys to play – your baby can play with safe, simple things around the house. But toy libraries offer toys on loan for free or a small fee. For your nearest call 020 7255 4604.
- As your baby gets older, don't try to teach him anything during play. He will learn best if he chooses what to play and you follow his lead.



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# Sharing songs and rhymes

Babies love songs and rhymes, especially hearing the sound of your voice. And they're a great way to help your child's talking and listening skills.

- Your voice is your baby's favourite music so sing to her, even if you don't think you sound great. Your baby won't judge you.
  - Turn off the TV or radio so your child can hear your voice.
  - You don't have to sing 'baby' songs - it can be the latest chart music. If you like the song, your baby will enjoy it too.
  - Don't worry if you don't know any nursery rhymes. Sing the songs you do know and visit the library to borrow rhyming books or tapes.
  - Look at your baby as you sing or chant and see how he reacts to different parts of the rhyme. Can you see his fingers wriggle?
  - When your baby is tired or upset try singing a favourite song, slowly and quietly, to comfort her.
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- Young children learn best through play, so make songs and rhymes fun. Change the sound of your voice, make up some actions or add your child's name or the names of family and friends.
  - When your baby or toddler joins in, show that you've noticed by giving lots of encouragement.
  - Even if your toddler is just beginning to talk, listen to his reaction to the song or rhyme.



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# Sharing books with your baby

**Sharing books is a wonderful way to help your child learn to talk, and it's the ideal opportunity to share a cuddle at the same time.**

- Find a quiet place. Turn off the TV or radio so there are no distractions.
- As well as reading the story, talk about the pictures. If there's a picture of a dog, talk about a dog that you know.
- Give your child time to respond to your chatter.
- Don't put any pressure on your child to name the pictures, but if she copies your words, praise her and say the words again for her.
- Visit your library for different books – it's free to join. Don't worry if books get damaged; libraries understand that this sometimes happens.
- Don't read for too long. Young children get bored quickly so little and often is best.



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- Let other grown-ups – grandparents, carers and older brothers and sisters – join in too.
- It's good to share favourite books again and again. Repetition helps children to understand and remember the language they hear.
- Remember, you're not teaching your child to read. You learn to talk a long time before you learn to read, and book sharing is a wonderful way to help your child's language development.



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# Making the most of television

Like adults, children sometimes feel tired or stressed and want to relax by watching television. Used in the right way, television can be beneficial. But too much can be harmful, so it's important to find the right balance.

- Try to limit your child's daily TV time to no more than half an hour for under-tuos and an hour for three to five-year-olds. This will give you time for important activities like playing.
- Always turn off the TV when no one is watching because constant background noise can distract you and your children from playing, listening and talking to each other.
- Try to limit your child's viewing to programmes that have been designed for her age-group.
- Allow your child to watch the same video or DVD again and again. This can be better than television as the repetition and familiarity of words and phrases make it easier for children to learn from them.
- Don't put a television in your child's bedroom. This gives you less control over what and how much television he watches. If your child does have a TV in his room, make sure it is closely monitored.
- Try to watch TV or videos together so you can talk about what happens.

