

Speech and language development

Birth to 12 months

What can I expect as my baby learns to communicate?

While children learn at different rates, you can look for typical patterns at certain ages. The skills listed here are in the order you may see them in your child.

1. Child cries because of hunger, discomfort, anger, or the need for consolation.
2. At first, smiling and laughing may be reflexive, and not caused by emotions.
3. Child coos (vowel sounds like “ooh” and “ahh”), gurgles, and makes other sounds.
4. Child babbles, repeating sounds over and over, “bababa,” “dadada,” “mamama.”
5. Child imitates your actions, sounds, and words.
6. Child follows simple directions: “Touch Mama’s nose.” “Give me a kiss.”
7. A one-year-old child may say a few words: “ball,” “mama,” “dada.”

What can I do to help my child?

Encourage your child’s development by engaging in simple, turn-taking activities: smiling back, singing, and playing simple games (like peek-a-boo, “so big”).

Repeat the sounds your child makes. Use simple gestures to show what you mean (hold out your hand when you ask for something). Talk simply, using common words.

Toys and activities provide stimulation and something to talk about. Ideas include:

Purchased toys

- busy box
- cloth books
- mirror toys
- mobile (hang well out of baby’s reach, or use only when you are watching)
- musical stuffed animals
- plastic blocks
- rattles
- soft toys

Homemade toys

- cradle gym
- mobile (hang well out of baby’s reach, or use only when you are watching)
- fabric (bright)
- pictures (large, bright)
- puppets

Favorite activities

- pat-a-cake
- peek-a-boo

Questions?

This sheet is not specific to your child, but provides general information. If you have any questions, please ask your child’s doctor or nurse practitioner.