

0-6 months

There are lots of things babies need to learn to be ready for talking. At this early age babies like to look at faces and are learning to look at and explore objects. Any games that concentrate on listening to sounds and looking at objects encourage enjoyment of communication.

For example;

- Peek-a-Boo
- Round and Round The Garden
- Pat-a-cake
- Hiding and Finding a Toy
- Giving and Taking

Here is how to play 'giving and taking':

1. Use a lightweight toy, such as a rattle.
2. Call your baby's name to get their attention.
3. Offer your baby the toy so it is in easy reach of his/her hand. Let your baby take it.
4. The baby plays with the toy for 1-2 minutes.
5. Hold out your hand and say 'ta'.
6. When your baby gives back the toy, say 'ta' again and have a play for 1-2 minutes. Make verbal noises similar to the toy. Encourage your baby to give the toy if needed.
7. Continue with the 'giving and talking' game.

6-12 months

At this age babies are becoming more involved in their environment, they are learning about a wide range of people and objects, although may not yet understand or say many names.

Any games that develop their understanding of the world will encourage their enjoyment of it. For example;

- Exploring familiar objects around the house
- Building blocks
- Pretend play
- Cause and effect toys (if they do something, something else will happen, for example, you press a button and a noise is made or the toy pops up.)

Here is how to make a game using familiar objects;

1. Place a number of familiar objects in a bag / box (for example, a spoon, cup, ball, hat, hair brush, sock)
2. Encourage your baby to find an object in the bag / box
3. Spend a few minutes playing with the object (for example, putting the hat on your head,

babies head, teddies head)

4. Put the object back in the bag / box
5. Encourage the baby to pull out a new object
6. Continue with this game

12-18 months

At this age children can often understand familiar words and are beginning to say several. They are learning that “talking is fun” and “talking is useful”.

Games that motivate children to want to talk include;

- Bubbles
- Ready, steady, go activities with a rolling ball or swing
- Jack in the box
- Hide-and-seek
- Building

Here is how to play with bubbles;

1. Blow bubbles for your child.
2. Encourage your child to watch the bubbles and pop them.
3. Say words like ‘look’, ‘bubbles’, ‘up’, ‘pop’, ‘down’, ‘gone’.
4. Leave a brief pause in the game to encourage your child to initiate asking for more through words or gesture. If there is no response, you say ‘more’. In this way you are helping your child to realise that words are powerful and make things happen.
5. Continue with this game.

Extended versions of the ‘bubbles’ game are;

- Include other people / children to introduce some turn taking and to learn names.
- Send bubbles to different parts of the room (for example, up to the lights, to the window, in the cupboard etc.).
- Ask your child where they want the bubbles to go next. Give a choice, such as ‘the door or the lights?’

2-3 years

At this age children use language in a more purposeful way and are beginning to build simple sentences. There are many things to do to help your child develop language skills and some activities are outlined below.

- Sing nursery rhymes with your child and do the actions with them.
- Introduce simple story books that are repetitive and have flaps for your child to explore
- Play with toys that promote role-play, for example a doll’s house, garages and cars.
- Talk about things that are happening as they happen, this will help develop understanding of the ‘here and now’.
- Give your child choices throughout the day to help them learn new vocabulary, such as

- “Would you like orange or blackcurrant?”. Hold up the bottle as you say the word.
- Repeat back to your child what they have said adding extra words to it, e.g. your child says ‘car’, you say ‘blue car’.
 - Comment on what your child is doing (talk as you play and do everyday things)
 - Engage your child in ‘ready, steady, go’ activities, for example when playing with a ball before you pass it to your child say ‘ready, steady...’ then pause to give your child time to say ‘go’. If your child does not say ‘go’ say the word for them. Increase the amount of time between saying ‘steady’ and ‘go’ to develop your child’s attention. You can also do this activity with toys such as cars and wind up toys etc. This will also help with turn taking skills and should be encouraged early on, to help promote good behaviour and an understanding that we take turns in conversations.
 - Make sure your voice sounds interesting, vary the tone and intonation.
 - If your child says a word incorrectly (e. g. tat for cat) don’t point out that they’ve got it wrong, just say it back to them the correct way (yes that’s right it’s a cat)
 - Model good speech.
 - Name things that your child is looking at to help develop their vocabulary, a child must hear the word at least 50 times to learn it.
 - Reduce background noise and distractions and have quiet times.
 - Work / play for short periods of time. When your child becomes bored with an activity try and encourage them to have ‘one more turn’ and then finish.
 - Get down on the floor and play with your child. Make sure your child has appropriate toys for his / her age.
 - Make a ‘treasure box’ with topic toys or items in, for example a selection of farm animals and other things you would find on a farm (like a farmer and farm house)

3-4 years

At this age children start to use more questions and longer sentences. They can talk about things that happened in the past as well as things that are currently happening. Activities to develop your child’s language are outlined below.

- Talk about things that happened yesterday / lunch time to help develop your child’s understanding of the past tense.
- Talk about where your child is putting things as you are playing, such as “The doll’s in the house” / “Oh look the dog’s under the bed”.
- Use describing words to talk about what your child can see, such as “There’s a soft ball, shiny duck and fluffy blanket”. This will help develop your child’s understanding and vocabulary.
- Instruct your child to get you things, for example “Get me the cup next to the TV” / “Get me teddy that’s in front of the house”.
- Miss things out of general routines so that your child has to ask for things, e.g. ‘forget’ to give your child socks when they are getting dressed.
- If your child says a word incorrectly (e. g. tat for cat) don’t point out that they’ve got it wrong, just say it back to them the correct way (yes that’s right it’s a cat)
- Model good speech.
- As you’re out and about point out things around you that your child wouldn’t normally see to help develop their vocabulary.

4-5 years

At this age children start to understand conversation about the past, present and future. They begin to use longer sentences and will use more question words, such as 'Why', 'When', 'How' and will also ask the meaning of words. They will also be able to tell you about what they have done. Below are some strategies to support your child's language development.

- Encourage your child to talk about the past, for example, ask your child what s/he did yesterday.
- Encourage your child to talk about the future, for example, ask your child what s/he is doing tomorrow.
- When your child is telling you about their day, ask them what they did next or what they did after dinner.
- Make sure you answer your child's questions.
- If you think the child will know the answer to their question ask them what they think the answer is.

Example:

- Child: 'Why do I have to go to school?'
- Adult: 'Why do you think you have to go to school?'
- If they ask the same question as one they have earlier in the day ask them if they can remember what you said before.
- Model good speech.
- As you're out and about point out things around you that your child wouldn't normally see to help develop their vocabulary.
- Visit your local library and let your child choose a book, point at the words as you read the story. Ask your child to re-tell the story when you've finished reading it.