

LEARNING TO SPEAK IS A CRUCIAL PART OF A CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT AND THE MOST INTENSIVE PERIOD OF SPEECH AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT HAPPENS IN THE FIRST THREE YEARS OF LIFE.

BABIES: 0-1 YEAR

During their first year, children develop the ability to hear and recognise the sounds of their parents' language. They experiment with sounds by babbling (e.g. "dada", "mamabada"), and over time, their babbling begins to sound more and more like real words.

What can most babies do?

- Between 0-3 months babies communicate by crying, cooing, smiling, and making eye contact
- Between 3-6 months babies communicate by crying, cooing, smiling, making eye contact, pointing, blowing raspberries and laughing
- Between 6-9 months babies communicate by babbling, using sounds made with the lips (e.g. b and m) in sequences like "mama" and later "mabada"
- Between 9-12 months babies communicate by babbling, using more sounds (e.g. d, m, n, h, w, t)
- Around 12 months babies begin to use words

What do many babies still find difficult?

Babies can't say words the same way as adults do and often simplify words (e.g. biscuit becomes "bi").

What can you do to help?

Children who do not progress through this stage of "playing with sounds" are at risk of speech difficulties later. As a parent, you can help by talking to your child and responding to any attempts they make to communicate (e.g. by copying their babbling).

AGE 1-3 YEARS

Toddlers experience a huge development in speech

sounds and triple the number of words they can say between 1 and 2 years of age. As a result, their speech becomes easier to understand. At 2 years, half of their speech should be understood, and at 3 years, most of their speech should be understood by family and friends.

What can most toddlers do?

- By 2 years, toddlers can say a range of speech sounds when talking (e.g. p, b, m, t, d, n, h, w)
- By 3 years, toddlers can say even more sounds (e.g. k, g, f, s, ng)

What do many toddlers still find difficult?

Many toddlers have difficulty saying sounds correctly all the time. Some words are more difficult than others for children to say, so they may make some sound errors (e.g. "tat" for "cat" and "pam" for pram). Sometimes, children can be more difficult to understand when they are using longer sentences.

What can you do to help?

- Parents can continue to help their child's speech development by modelling the correct way of saying words, for example if a child says "where tup?" you can say "oh, where's the cup?". However, if a toddler's speech is very difficult for parents to understand, or if they are using gestures (and grunts) in place of words, parents should contact a Speech and Language Therapist for further advice.
- If parents are concerned about their child's speech development, they should have their child's hearing checked by an audiologist, as hearing is important in learning how to say sounds correctly.



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