

# *SpeechContacts*

Help your child learn  
to talk



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# SPEECHFILE

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# **STOP! LOOK! LISTEN!**

## **LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS FOR SPEECH**

Remember that simple road safety guidance? Believe it or not, the same advice can be the key to your child's success with language. Teach him to stop, to look and to listen, and you offer him a wonderful start in life.

Help him to **STOP** rushing from one activity to another. Help him to concentrate on one toy at a time. Tidy away his other toys, turn off the TV, get down on the floor with him and join in. Give him a pile of bricks and help him to balance them on top of each other, knock them down, and balance them up again.

Help him to **LOOK** carefully at toys, at pictures, at the world around him. Most importantly, help him to look at you. He needs to watch your face, and make eye-contact with you. By doing this, he picks up your approval of his actions, or your disapproval. He notices your smiles and responds to them. He communicates with you. Play peep-bo games, hold finger puppets up to your face, make faces to focus his attention on your face.

Help him to **LISTEN** to the sounds around. Enjoying a

nursery rhyme, searching for a hidden ticking clock, or squeezing squeaky toys, he is laying the foundation for good language.

### **Why is it important to stop, look and listen?**

Careful looking, attentive listening and concentration on the matter in hand are vital language skills. Recent research clearly shows that daily attention to basic communication skills can lead to improved speech and language for significant numbers of children. It can prevent the need for speech and language therapy later.

Babies develop very rapidly, in a number of ways. They will learn to follow things with their eyes, learn to lift their heads, then sit, shuffle or crawl, walk and talk. Vitally, if they are to develop good speech and language skills they also learn how to listen.

All these changes take place within a small time frame, during the short years of babyhood. It appears that there is an optimum time, or critical period, for the development of a baby's skills. During this critical period, development tends to be rapid and successful. If the critical period is missed, for example if a child is seriously ill, it takes more time and effort for him to acquire that skill.

This does not mean that a child will have learning

difficulties, or be severely disadvantaged if the time of optimum development for a language skill is missed, but it does mean that checking for skill development at the right time can show whether extra help would be useful for your child.

So far as language skills are concerned, it is important that speech and language should develop rapidly within the first three years of life. Listening skills can be assessed as early as nine months, at the same time that some hearing tests take place, and extra attention that you pay to the development of listening skills at this early age will pay dividends in later life. Children who have good listening skills often go on to develop good reading abilities. This is by far the most important time in your child's life for laying down vital listening and attention skills that will help his speech and language development, and the first year is vital.

### **How can I help?**

Begin by communicating with your baby whenever you can. This does not have to be by talking. Looking at his face, smiling and singing to him are all valuable means of communication.

Before he is six months old, your baby can make eye-contact with you and smile at you. The bonding that takes place between you now will lay down good communication patterns for the future.

As your baby grows he will spend longer periods awake, and will coo and gurgle with you. Let your voice be the one he hears most, not voices from the television. Spend time with him and let the housework wait. Play the baby games in this book, and any others you can think of that you both enjoy, and keep talking and singing.

By the time your baby is a year old, you should be aware that he listens to sounds around, that he turns when noises are made behind his back, that he is making repetitive nonsense sounds, such as 'ba-ba-ba', and that he looks at familiar objects, such as the family pet, when you name them. He may even be saying a word or two, but this is less important than showing an interest in sounds.

If you think your year old child is not showing interest in sounds, and is not making repetitive sounds or playing with noise, then you should ask for an appointment with a speech and language therapist. If it is difficult to find an NHS therapist able to see your child within a few months, an appointment with an independent therapist who is experienced in working with very young children would be worthwhile.

When your child becomes a toddler, he will be active and lively. Let him run and have fun, but keep some quiet times every day for just you and your child. End each day with a story before bedtime. This is a stage where you should try to introduce a little routine into your child's life, so that he has a framework to the day.