

Communication strategies for parents

Play and talk – 0 to 12 months

A guide with things to notice as I grow and develop during this stage

Listening and attention

- I prefer to listen to your voice
- I am startled by loud noises
- I watch your face when you talk
- I focus on different sounds, e.g. telephone, doorbell, clock

Understanding

- I can recognise your voice I learnt it before I was born
- I am often calmed by friendly voices, e.g. my parents
- I get excited when I hear your voice
- I understand words that you use all the time such as 'all gone', 'no' and 'bye-bye'
- I stop and look when I hear my name
- I understand simple instructions when you use gestures and show me

Speech sounds and talk

- Sometimes I cry, especially when I'm unhappy or uncomfortable e.g. when I'm too hot, have a tummy-ache, when I'm scared, or have a wet nappy
- I make sounds, e.g. cooing, gurgling
- I make sounds to get your attention and I make sounds back when you talk to me
- I laugh when you play with me
- I babble to myself then use speech sounds (babbling) to talk to you; I say sounds like 'ba-ba, no-no, go-go'
- I stop babbling when I hear a familiar adult voice
- I use gestures such as waving and pointing to help me communicate
- At about 12 months I begin to use single words e.g. 'mummum', 'dada', 'tete' (teddy)

Social skills

- I look at faces and copy facial movements, e.g. sticking out tongue when you hold me close
- I make eye contact for fairly long periods
- I sense different emotions in your voice and may respond in different ways for example, smile, go quiet, laugh
- I cry in different ways when I need different things
- I get worried when I meet people I don't know
- I enjoy action rhymes and songs
- I try to copy your speech sounds and lip movements
- I take 'turns' in conversations (using babble)
- I'm starting to wave and point

Things to do

- Play games with me, pull funny faces, and copy the faces I make, clap my hands, and tickle me.
- Talk to me when we are doing things together like feeding, getting dressed, bathing and nappy change; leave time for me to have my turn to make sounds when you are talking to me.
- Make quiet times during the day so I can listen easily.
- Play round and round the garden, and sing songs to me. Round and round the garden like a teddy bear, one step, two steps, and a tickly under there.
- Use kind words, stroke and cuddle me. Give me some quiet time with you; turn the television, computer, radio, mobile phone off.
- Try to keep my dummy for naptime so I can practise talking.
- Say the same words over and over again, and copy some of the sounds that I make. Look at books together.

Play and talk – 12 to 18 months

A guide with things to notice as I grow and develop during this stage

Attention and listening

- I listen to music and singing
- I enjoy sound -making using toys/objects e.g. saucepan and wooden spoon
- I listen and respond to simple information or instructions, e.g. 'Ben, put on shoes', 'Mohammed, give to daddy'

Understanding

- I understand single words in context e.g. 'cup', 'milk', when drinking; and 'Daddy' when I can see Daddy coming
- I understand more words than I can say
- I understand simple instructions e.g. 'kiss mummy', 'give to daddy', 'stop'
- I understand a wide range of single words and some two-word phrases e.g. 'give me', 'shoe on'
- I recognise and point to objects and pictures in books if you ask me to
- I will give familiar objects to you if you name them e.g. coat, car, apple, book

Speech sounds and talk

- I say around 10 single words, although they may not be clear
- I can reach or point to something and make speech sounds to tell you I want it
- I still babble but use at least 20 single words correctly, although I may not be clear
- I copy gestures and words from you
- I am constantly babbling and using single words while I play
- I can change the sound of my voice to loud or quiet, high or low, and my babbling sounds like I am saying a sentence

Social skills

- I like being with people I know
- I like watching you for a short time
- I am beginning to pretend play
- I can play by myself, and am getting more independent but I am happier when I am near people I know

Things to do

- Talk to me about what you are doing (e.g. 'Mummy is putting shoes on'). This will help me to connect words to the world around me.
- Use toys and objects that make a noise, as well as noisy books and tapes this will help my attention and listening skills.
- Play games with me involving 'more' or 'again' this can help my attention and language.
- Name the objects I can see – this could be my toys or my clothes, parts of my body or household objects.
- I like you to sing nursery rhymes, like 'InceyWincey-spider' with actions; and play games like 'pat-a-cake' and 'peek-a-boo':
 - Pat-a-cake, pat-a-cake bakers man, bake me a cake as fast as you can, prick it and pat it and mark it with B and put it in the oven for baby and me
 - Incey Wincey spider climbed up the water spout, down came the rain and washed poor Incey out. Out came the sunshine and dried up all the rain, and Incey Wincey spider climbed up the spout again.
- Name the objects I can see – this could be my toys or my clothes, parts of my body or household objects.
- If I am pointing at something, tell me what it is! If I try to say the word, say it back to me.

Play and talk – 18 months to 2 years

A guide with things to notice as I grow and develop during this stage

Attention and listening

- I can focus on an activity that I choose but can find it difficult if you ask me to do something
- Use my name to help me to listen to what you say, e.g. 'Sarah, eat sandwiches', 'Ali, put coat on'

Understanding

- I can understand more single words (anything between 200 and 500 words)
- I understand more simple instructions, e.g. 'Get mummy's shoes', 'Get your bricks', 'Tell dad tea's ready'

Speech sounds and talk

- I use up to 50 words
- I am beginning to put two or three words together
- I am beginning to ask questions, e.g. the names of people and objects (towards two years of age)
- I can use these speech sounds in my words - p,b,m,w

Social skills

- My 'pretend' play is developing with toys, such as feeding a doll or driving a car
- I sometimes get frustrated or have a tantrum when people don't understand me
- I follow adults body language including pointing, gesture and facial expressions

Things to do

- Use objects and gestures to help me to understand. Or give me two or three alternatives: 'do you want teddy or the car?'; 'is this your nose or your foot?'
- Talk about everyday activities as we do them together, like putting away the shopping. This helps me to connect language to the world around me.

- When we are playing say the whole word back to me, this helps me learn new words – don't correct me. Make sure I can see your face when you are talking to me – I can watch and copy the movements that your lips make as you say sounds and words. Make funny faces in the mirror together.
- Continue to sing songs and say rhymes when we are at home or when we are out.
 - Baa baa black sheep have you any wool, yes, yes sir, 3 bags full, one for the master, one for the dame, and one for the little boy who lives down the lane.
 - The wheels on the bus go round and round, round and round, round and round, the wheels on the bus go round and round, all day long.
- Look at pictures in books with me and describe what is there. This is just as good as actually reading the story. 'Lift-the-flap' books can help me to concentrate.
- I like playing outside - repeat what I say so I am hearing the correct words as I play.
- Start adding words to what I say: if I say 'juice' you could say 'more juice', 'juice please' or 'juice gone'. This shows me how words can be put together, making short sentences.

Play and talk – 2 to 3 years

A guide with things to notice as I grow and develop during this stage

Attention and listening

- I am beginning to listen to talk with interest, but I am easily distracted.
- Later I listen to talk addressed to me, but find it difficult if prompts are not provided, e.g. use my name, or say 'stop and listen'

Understanding

- I am beginning to understand simple concepts including in/on/under, big/little
- I understand phrases like 'put teddy in the box', 'get your book, coat and bag', 'draw a big brown dog'
- I understand simple 'who' and 'what' and 'where' questions but not why
- I understand a simple story when I can see the pictures

Speech sounds and talk

- I use about 300 words including words to describe time – now, later, after; space – next to, in there, too big; use of objects – car for driving, spoon for eating.
- I put four to five words together in a sentence
- I may stutter or stammer when I am thinking what to say
- I am able to use pronouns (me, him, she), plurals (books, cars) and prepositions (in, on, under)
- I may have problems saying these speech sounds in words: l/r/w/y, f/th, s/sh/ch/dz/j

Social skills

- I can have a conversation but jump from topic to topic
- I am interested in other people's play and will join in
- I am beginning to say what I am feeling rather than just using actions like cuddling or hitting and pushing

Things to do

- Use puppets, pictures of characters in a story, as well as pictures in a book to help me listen to and enjoy stories.
- Answer my questions – I am finding out lots of information.

- I am learning new words as we play new games and go to new places. Repeat what I say using the right words and sounds; if you correct me or make me say it again, I will feel anxious or frustrated - soon I will be able to do it myself.
- Tell me stories again and again; the more I hear a story the better I understand and remember the language that I hear.
- Add another word to my sentences to show how words fit together – e.g. if I say 'dolly hair' you can say 'brush dolly's hair' or 'dolly's hair is brown'.
- I enjoy helping and sharing your jobs like washing up, sorting the clothes. This gives opportunities for you to comment about objects and actions, as well as giving me new words.
- Songs:
 - Head, shoulders, knees and toes, knees and toes, head, shoulders, knees and toes, knees and toes, and eyes and ears and mouth and nose, head, shoulders, knees and toes, knees and toes.
 - Old McDonald had a farm e, i, e, i, o, and on his farm he had a cow e, i, e, i, o. With a moo moo here, a moo moo there, here a moo, there a moo, everywhere a moo moo. Old McDonald had a farm e, i, e, i, o.

Play and talk – 3 to 4 years

A guide with things to notice as I grow and develop during this stage

Attention and listening

- I enjoy listening to stories
- I still find it difficult to pay attention to more than one thing at a time, so I can't easily listen to you while I am still playing
- I have to switch my attention between you and my play

Understanding

- I understand questions or instructions with two parts: 'get your jumper' and 'stand by the door'
- I understand 'why' questions
- I am beginning to understand time in relation to past, present and future, e.g. Today is sunny, yesterday was rainy. I wonder what the weather will be like tomorrow? (towards four years)

Speech sounds and talk

- I use sentences of four to six words, e.g. 'I want to play with cars', 'What's that thingy called?'
- I use words related to future and past tense e.g. tomorrow, yesterday.
- I may continue to have problems with irregular words, 'runned' for 'ran', 'swimmed' for 'swam'
- I am able to remember and enjoy telling long stories or singing songs
- I have problems saying r, j, th, ch, and sh

Social skills

- I understand turn-taking as well as sharing with adults and friends
- I can start conversations
- I enjoy playing with children my own age
- I am able to argue with adults or friends if they disagree – using words, not just actions

Things to do

- Make a special time to talk with me about the day. Talking about what has happened that day will help my memory skills. It also helps me to talk

about things I cannot immediately see and to talk about the things which happened in the past.

- Talk about or play games with me involving opposites like 'on and off' or 'big and little'.
- While I am playing comment on what I am saying and doing, don't ask me lots of questions. This will help me to learn new words and shows me that you are interested and listening to me.
- Talk about time and sequences e.g. later, next, numbers and days of the week. Also sequences of coloured bricks or shapes.
- Join me in pretend play – let me take the lead and show you what I can imagine. This will help my language and my creativity.
- Let me pretend to be 'mummy' or 'daddy' and you pretend to be me – this is fun as I can tell you what to do and I can use language in new ways.
- Use pictures or objects to help my attention and interest, e.g., use pictures in books, puppets, and act out stories, and use gestures and facial expressions to help me understand questions.
- Songs:
 - Miss Polly had a dolly who was sick, sick, sick. So she phoned for the doctor to come quick, quick, quick. The doctor came with his bag and his hat, and he knocked on the door with a rat-a-tat-tat. He looked at the dolly and he shook his head, he said Miss Polly put her straight to bed. The doctor gave her a pill, pill, pill, I'll be back in the morning yes I will, will, will.
 - 5 little speckled frogs, sat on a speckled log eating the most delicious grubs, yum, yum. One jumped into the pool, where it was nice and cool, then there were...4 green speckled frogs, glub glub. (Continue with 4 then 3, 2, 1, frogs until they have all jumped into the pool)

Play and talk – 4 to 5 years

A guide with things to notice as I grow and develop during this stage

Attention and listening

- My attention is now more flexible – I can understand your instructions related to a task without stopping what I am doing to look at you

Understanding

- I am able to follow a simple story without pictures
- I understand instructions with sequencing words; 'first... after... last'
- I understand adjectives (describing words) e.g. soft, hard, smooth, etc
- I am aware of more complex humour, I laugh at jokes that are told

Speech sounds and talk

- I use well formed sentences, e.g. 'I played with Ben at lunch time' but there may still be some mistakes
- I am easily understood by adults and friends, with only a few difficulties with speech sounds, for example, 'th', 'r' and with more difficult combinations of speech sounds e.g. 'scribble'
- I frequently ask the meaning of unfamiliar words and may use them randomly

Social skills

- I chooses my own friends
- I generally co-operate with playmates
- I am able to plan some activities such as construction and make believe play
- I take turns in longer conversations
- I use language to gain information, negotiate, discuss feelings/ideas and give opinions

Things to do

- Ask my key person or teacher what I like doing or singing at nursery or school. We can talk about and try the same things at home, and learn new songs and rhymes.
- Play simple board games with me so I can learn to take turns, and learn to listen and concentrate for longer.

- I like talking to you but don't ask me too many questions. Use open questions like 'What are you going to play with today?' will encourage me to say more than 'yes' and 'no'. If I find it difficult to answer questions, it might help to start off by giving me a couple of choices, 'cars or animals?'
- Play ideas can be very cheap, like play-dough, big cardboard boxes, digging in compost, making dens from an old sheet and a table, toys from a toy library and books from the library.
- Give me time to think before I answer or respond to your question and instructions. Don't answer for me or finish my sentence.
- Let's do interesting things together like going to the park, beach, local farm or to friends, or reading books. I am still learning new words and phrases.
- Make up funny words or nonsense rhymes e.g. silly soup, hairy Mary, fat cat. I need to learn the differences and similarities between word sounds for reading and writing.
- Song:
 - If you're happy and you know it clap your hands, if you're happy and you know it clap your hands, if you're happy and you know it and you really want to show it, if you're happy and you know it clap your hands. (continue with stamp your feet, nod your head, say 'we are').