Early communication

Children start communicating from birth. Babies let us know they are hungry or cold with simple cries and these are the very first stages of your child’s language development. After this they will start to use sounds, facial expression, reaching, pointing and gestures to tell you what they need. Even though your child may not be speaking yet they will be communicating with you in many different ways.

It will help your child if you:

- Encourage them to listen to, and be aware of, sounds in the environment, e.g. when the phone rings talk about where the sound is coming from. You can draw your child’s attention to other sounds like someone knocking on the door or a dog barking.
- Gain their attention before speaking to them, e.g. saying their name.
- Take turns (with speech sounds) - listen to your child and copy the sounds they make, e.g. blowing raspberries, laughing, coughing, babbling, e.g. ma ma ma, da da da.
- Take turns (in play):
  - Peek-a-boo
  - Hiding toys behind your back or just covering them with a cloth or cushion to encourage your child to search.
  - Sitting opposite your child, roll a ball to them and encourage them to roll it back. Use language to comment, e.g. ‘Mummy’s turn’
- Use gesture and pointing as well as just speaking to your child. At first use these gestures to support your child’s understanding of simple instructions or routines, e.g. waving, ‘come here’, ‘sit down’, ‘stand up’
- Offer your child choices e.g. ‘milk or water?’
- Use sounds to go with actions, feelings or situations, e.g. “brum, brum” – for a car sound; “ow” – when someone is hurt; “oops” – if something has fallen.
- Play with sounds. For example you could use animal sounds in the following ways:
  - Say the animal sounds when looking at a picture book.
  - Play hide and seek with toy animals, making the sounds when you find them.
  - Say an animal sound and ask your child to find it.
  - Say nursery rhymes and sing action songs e.g. ‘The wheels on the bus’, ‘If you’re happy and you know it, clap your hands’, ‘Head, shoulders, knees and toes’

For further information please contact: Department of Speech and Language Therapy
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For further copies of this leaflet or if you require this information in another format or language please contact: Department of Speech and Language Therapy numbers above.

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