

South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control

# Please Talk to Me

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a speech guide for parents



## HOW DO CHILDREN LEARN TO TALK?

Most parents don't think about how children learn to talk. They usually think that talking is just something children do without any special help, like walking or sleeping at night.

The truth is, before children **learn** to talk by hearing words over and over again (from birth.) Then they have to practice saying words over and over again before they can say them correctly. It usually takes a year of listening and practicing before a baby can say her first word!

**Talk and Listen to your child. This will make it easier for him to learn to talk and understand.**

Babies and children learn to talk in steps. For example, a 1-year-old baby should be saying at least one word that you know has meaning besides "Mama" or "Dada." A 2-year-old child should be saying a few two-word sentences like "want milk" or "car gone" and so on.

This booklet is a guide for you to see what your child should be saying and understanding for her age. It also gives you enjoyable things to do with your child at different ages to help him talk and understand well.

Don't think of helping your child learn to talk well as a chore. Just relax and **enjoy** your child. Take pride in his learning new things; **cherish** the cute things he says and does. If you do this, he'll grow up **happy AND smart!**

A SPECIAL NOTE: Remember, never criticize or correct your child's speech. It may make her afraid to talk. Just talk with your child a lot and say things correctly yourself.

## BY 1 MONTH

### **Speech, Language & Hearing Skills Most Babies Develop**

- She cries.
- She startles to loud, sudden noises.
- She makes throaty sounds.

If your baby does not do all these things, see your baby's health care provider and ask about it.

### **Activities for Parents & Babies Aged 0-3 Months**

- Talk to your baby while rocking or cuddling him.
- Wind up a musical toy to put by your baby's bed.
- Talk to your baby when feeding, dressing, bathing, and changing diapers.



## BY 3 MONTHS

### *Speech, Language & Hearing Skills Most Babies Develop*

- He makes sounds like “ooh,” “ah,” and “uh.”
- He whimpers, squeals, and chuckles.
- He listens to voices.
- He sometimes quiets to familiar voices.

If your baby does not do all of these things, see your baby’s health care provider and ask about it.

### *Activities for Parents & Babies Aged 3–6 Months*

- Copy your baby’s sounds: coos, sighs, and gurgles.
- Sing or hum to your baby while rocking or holding him closely.
- Keep on talking to your baby when feeding, dressing, bathing, and changing diapers.
- Let your baby hear you before seeing you. Knock on the door or call her name before coming into the room.
- Play soft music when your baby is quiet.



## BY 6 MONTHS

### *Speech, Language & Hearing Skills Most Babies Develop*

- She babbles to herself (“baba,” “gaga,” “ma”).
- She squeals with excitement.
- She tries to copy changes in voice pitch.
- She turns her head toward a sound.
- She cries differently for pain or hunger.

If your baby does not do all of these things, see your baby’s health care provider and ask about it.



### *Activities for Parents & Babies Aged 6–9 Months*

- Continue to repeat your baby’s new sounds: “dada,” “mama,” “ga.” This is called babbling.
- Your baby will enjoy playing with noisy toys and rattles.
- Keep on talking to your baby while feeding, dressing, bathing, and changing diapers.
- Your baby will enjoy playing games such as “Peek-a-Boo,” and “Patty-Cake.”
- Call your baby’s name to see if she can turn toward you.

## BY 9 MONTHS

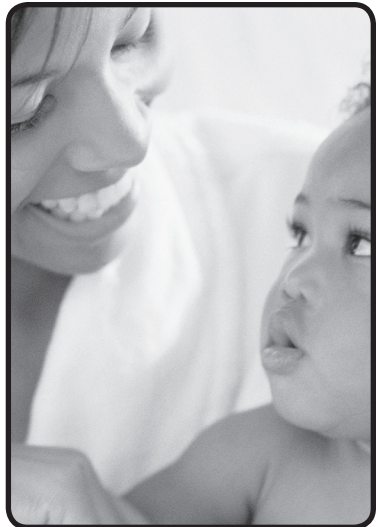
### *Speech, Language & Hearing Skills Most Babies Develop*

- He copies speech sounds of other people.
- He stops when “no no” or name is said.
- He acts differently to friendly or angry talking.
- He changes the pitch of own voice.
- He turns his head toward a sound and finds the sound if at eye level or below.

If your baby does not do all of these things, see your baby’s health care provider and ask about it.

### *Activities for Parents & Babies Aged 9–12 Months*

- Your baby will enjoy imitating your tones of voice. Continue to imitate his babbling.
- Be sure to respond to your baby’s babbling. She is talking to you.
- Your baby will enjoy listening to rhymes and songs. Babies this age love songs with hand motions like “The Itsy Bitsy Spider.”
- Make sounds around the room. Watch your baby go find them.
- Talk to your baby about what you’re doing. He wants to talk to you.





## BY 12 MONTHS

### Speech, Language & Hearing Skills Most Toddlers Develop

- She uses one word correctly besides “mama” or “dada.”
- She stirs or wakes when sleeping quietly, when there is a loud sound, or when someone is talking nearby.
- She gives a toy to someone when asked.
- She responds to music or singing.
- She finds a sound if it’s above or below eye level.

If your toddler does not do all of these things, see your toddler’s health care provider and ask about it.

### Activities for Parents & Toddlers Aged 12–15 Months

- Looking in the mirror is always fun. Point out facial and/or body parts on you and your child. Ask, “Where is your nose?” She will need help.
- Look at picture books with your child. Talk about the pictures.
- Play music. Your child will like to dance.
- Talk about and play with toy animals. Your child can say what the animals say: “Bow-wow,” “meow,” “moo-oo.”

**TALK-TALK-TALK**



## BY 15 MONTHS

### *Speech, Language & Hearing Skills Most Toddlers Develop*

- He points to objects he knows. Ask, “Where is your shoe?”
- He uses three or four words correctly besides “mama” or “dada.”
- He copies adults’ tones of voice.

If your toddler does not do all of these things, see your toddler’s health care provider and ask about it..



### *Activities for Parents & Toddlers Aged 15–18 Months*

- Your toddler may enjoy listening to clocks and watches. Show him how to rock to the “tick tock.” Plastic bottles filled with dried beans or rice make good rhythm toys.
- Ask your toddler to repeat the names of objects before she can have them, like cookie, drink, or milk.
- Play “Hide and Seek.” Hide a toy behind you or under a blanket. Ask, “Where is it?” Talk about what you’re doing.



## BY 18 MONTHS



### *Speech, Language & Hearing Skills Most Toddlers Develop*

- She points to familiar pictures she knows when you say something like, “Show me the rabbit.”
- She shows what she wants by naming objects such as a cookie.
- She matches sound to object. For example she might say “ding dong” when the doorbell rings.

If your toddler does not do all of these things, see your toddler’s health care provider and ask about it.

### *Activities for Parents & Toddlers Aged 18–21 Months*

- When you look at picture books, ask your child to point out pictures. For example say, “Where is the cow?”
- Include your child in routine household activities. Have him help dust or make the bed. Talk about what you’re doing.
- Play ball. Your child will enjoy rolling and throwing the ball.
- “Hide and Seek” is still fun. Take turns hiding.

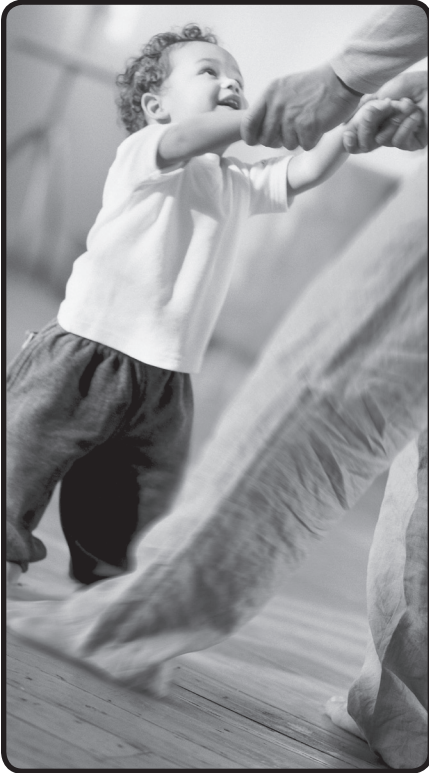
## BY 21 MONTHS

### *Speech, Language & Hearing Skills Most Toddlers Develop*

- He follows easy directions. “Get the ball” is a good example.
- He points to three to five body parts when named.
- He uses both words and nonsense when talking.

If your toddler does not do all of these things, see your toddler’s health care provider and ask about it.

### *Activities for Parents & Toddlers Aged 21–24 Months*



- Give your child easy directions, such as “Put your baby (doll) to sleep. She’s sleepy.” Make it fun.
- Play with a toy telephone. Your toddler will enjoy trying to say things like you do.
- Listening to music is fun. Clap, march, sing, beat a drum or dance to music. Let the whole family join in!
- Keep reading picture books and asking your child questions about the pictures. For instance a good question might be, “What does a sheep say?”

## BY 24 MONTHS

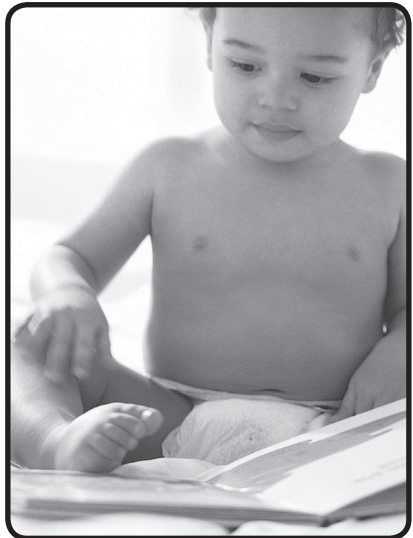
### *Speech, Language & Hearing Skills Most Toddlers Develop*

- She uses words more often than she points to tell you what she wants. For example she might say, “More cookie.”
- She refers to herself by name.
- She uses two or three word sentences like “Milk all gone.”
- Shows interest in sounds on television or radio.

If your toddler does not do all of these things, see your toddler’s health care provider and ask about it.

### *Activities for Parents & Toddlers Aged 1–3 Years*

- Water play is fun! Make bubbles, wash the baby doll, play with toys in the bathtub.
- Include your child in making cookies, washing the car, digging in the yard. It may take more time, but it will be fun for him.
- Cut out pictures for a scrapbook. Help your child paste all the trucks on one page, all the chairs on another page, for example.
- Keep reading picture books. Point out the names of objects that are new to the child, like “This is a fence.”



## Speech, Language & Hearing Skills Most Children Develop

- Other people should understand your child most of the time.
- He uses sentences with four or more words. An example, is, “Make the car go fast.”
- He knows approximately 900 words.

If your child does not do all of these things, see your child’s health care provider and ask about it.

## Activities for Parents & Children Aged 3–4 Years

- Continue to read and re-read children’s picture book stories. Talk about new ideas. You might say something like, “The dog feels sorry for the cat, doesn’t he?”
- Take your child on short trips and talk with her about what you are doing and seeing. Examples include the grocery store, the doctor’s office and the library.
- Provide crayons and blunt scissors and paper for your child to color and cut. Pasting pictures from old magazines is fun. Talk with him about what he is doing.
- Let your child play with other children.



## BY 4 YEARS

### Speech, Language & Hearing Skills Most Children Develop

- She is able to tell about things that happened recently. For example she might say, “I went to the doctor. I got a shot. He gave me a sticker. I was good.”
- She should be able to follow two instructions, one right after the other. An example is, “Antwan, find Keisha and tell her supper is ready.”
- She knows about 1,500 words.

If your child does not do all of these things, see your child’s health care provider and ask about it.

### Activities for Parents & Children Aged 4–5 Years

- Read more complex stories to your child, such as fairy tales and fables, as well as picture books. Have your child tell the story back to you.
- Ask your child to make up a story to tell you.
- Watch age-appropriate television shows with your child and talk with her about what’s happening in the story.
- Include your child in family conversations and trips. Ask him questions.
- Let your child play with children his age.



## Speech, Language & Hearing Skills Most Children Develop

- He can tell what objects are used for. For example he can tell you, “You cut with a knife.” He can tell what objects are made of. For example he can say, “A knife is made of metal.”
- He understands ideas such as “on top of,” “behind,” “far” and “near.”
- He knows about 2,000 words.
- He uses sentences with five to six words.
- He can tell a story well.
- He pronounces almost all speech sounds correctly.

If your child does not do all of these things, see your child’s health care provider and ask about it.

## Activities for Parents & Children Aged 5–6 Years

- Continue to read to your child and discuss longer stories.
- Get your child to talk about his feelings, wishes and fears.
- Talk to your child as you would an adult, for the most part.
- Continue to provide materials she can cut, paste, and color.
- Listen to your child when she talks to you.
- Discuss things that are going on in the family. For example, tell him what you do at work, etc.





# MOMMA, I CAN'T HEAR YOU!

Your baby must hear well to learn to develop speech and language skills. Both of these are important foundations to skills, such as reading, that will be needed to achieve academic success in school. Even if your child passed his newborn hearing test, he may start having hearing problems later. Hearing losses can keep your child from learning to talk well. Ear infections or fluid behind the eardrums may cause partial hearing losses.

You need to watch for signs that your baby is having trouble hearing. She probably won't be able to tell you, "Momma, I can't hear you." If you think your child may be having trouble hearing, see your child health care provider or local public health department **right away** and ask for a hearing test. Hearing can be tested at any age.



Watch for these signs of hearing loss:

0 - 6 months .....She doesn't respond to loud sounds

6 - 12 months.....She doesn't look for sounds  
She doesn't react to sounds consistently  
She stops babbling as much

12 months - or older .....She doesn't come when called  
She says "What?" or "Huh?" a lot  
She wants the television turned up louder  
She stops talking as much

At Any Age .....She has frequent ear infections

## **Resource**

This booklet was originally compiled using materials adapted from “Hearing and Speech: A Guide to Your Baby’s Development”, developed by the Health Care Program for Children with Special Needs, Colorado Department of Health.

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