



A better start for babies

Sensory

Motor

Attention/Regulation

Relationships

Together

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TALKING TO MY PRETERM BABY

Babies will show you when they are ready to “talk” to you.

Preterm babies younger than 32 weeks gestational age will sleep most of the time. Sleep is good for your baby and deep sleep helps your baby grow.

Your baby knows your voice and will respond to you when they are ready. In order to let your baby know you are there TALK GENTLY BEFORE YOU TOUCH.

What should I do?

- Your baby will like SLOW GENTLE HANDLING with good physical support
- The nurses will help you to hold your baby close and have skin-to-skin.
- Provide one type of stimulation at a time to begin with such as either touching or talking – watch how your baby reacts and see if your baby is ready for more.
- Avoid loud sounds and noise: quiet singing and talking softly to your baby is felt to be calming and reassuring for your baby.
- You do not need to make eye contact at this stage because your baby may not be ready yet.
- Avoid using noisy/busy toys or very bright objects as it may be too much for your baby to look at.
- Put your finger in your baby’s hand to hold



By 32 to 35 weeks your baby is becoming more ready to interact with you. Your baby is starting to seek social interaction and will want to “listen” to you and will be able to respond.

What should I do?

- Babies open their eyes more frequently, but cannot necessarily make eye contact with you. If your baby is awake and quiet, sit close to the incubator so that they can focus on your face.
- Hold out your finger for your baby to hold.
- Continue with regular skin to skin care to feel close to your baby.
- Provide stimulation using mostly your voice by singing or talking softly while your baby is placed in the skin to skin position or through the open porthole of the incubator.

As your baby approaches term age or around 36 weeks they will open their eyes more and will stay quiet and alert for longer periods of time. This is a great time for ‘talking’ together. Your baby will be learning about routines and begin to anticipate what happens next.

What should I do?

- Position your baby so that they are able to focus on your face and make eye contact. The ideal distance for a baby to see your face is felt to be around ‘breast feeding’ distance.
- Allow enough time for your baby to focus on your face and to respond.
- Watch your baby’s face and imitate facial expressions such as sticking out your tongue or opening your mouth. You may notice that your baby will look at you for longer periods.
- Talk softly to your baby while maintaining eye contact. You can sing any song or talk to your baby about anything. They already know your voice and will find it soothing to listen to you! This is a great time to start reading to your baby. This improves language and builds attention – this promotes and stimulates brain development.
- Talk and sing to your baby when you are changing their nappies or when you bathe them.
- Describe what you are doing as babies learn to anticipate what happens next. This is good training for babies for when they are older and understand what you are saying.
- Some babies enjoy hearing you talk to them while you are feeding them, other babies prefer a quiet environment so they can concentrate on feeding. All babies are different, and your baby will let you know what they prefer if you watch and observe their behavioural cues.
- Learn your baby’s behavioural cues - this is how your baby communicates with you.



Play is how a child learns. This leaflet was created to provide ideas for activities which can support communication, language, interaction and social emotional development. Development varies from child to child and these activities are not intended as medical or therapeutic advice. If you have any concerns about your child speak to your GP or health visitor.

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