

Communication with your Child Can Begin Now

Parents of young children are experts at communicating with their children long before those children learn to talk or to understand what their parents are saying to them. All of us have seen parents making funny faces for their babies. When a father makes a silly face for his baby, at first the baby might look surprised. But then the baby will break into a wide smile, or giggle and wiggle arms or legs. In the same way, communication also happens when a mother rocks her baby after a feeding, holds the baby close and gazes into her little one's eyes. Communication can include:

- Touch (such as rocking and holding your child)
- Vision (facial expressions, eye contact)
- Gestures, and
- Sound

Extending your arms to your child shows that you are about to pick him or her up. Other ways of communicating include smiling, laughing, hugging and letting your child keep you in sight. Your physical and visual contact with your child tells him or her that you are there and everything is safe.

Many children with hearing loss have some hearing and can partially hear voices, especially if the person talking is very close. So try speaking to your child while he or she is close to you and talk in a voice that you would use with a child who has full hearing. Your child might be very interested in looking at faces and will begin to understand that your face and mouth are sending important messages. So make sure that you often talk to your child when he or she is able to see your face.

Some things to remember when communicating with your child:

- Set your child close to you so that he or she can see your face.
- Try to minimize background noises so that your child can use the hearing he or she has to the best of his or her ability.
- Use good lighting. Be sure that the room is not too dark or the lights too bright. And don't sit or stand in front of a bright light such as a window. If you are in front of a bright light, your face will be in a shadow and your child will not be able to see your mouth.
- Make eye contact often.
- Imitate the movements and sounds your child makes, then wait for him or her to repeat them.

- Work on communicating with your child during activities that you both enjoy.
- Take time to communicate with your child many times throughout the day.
- Make some quiet time for both you and your child. If your child becomes restless, he or she may be overwhelmed by all of the communication.
- And most importantly, enjoy the time you and your child spend together.

These are some things you can do now while you are exploring and beginning to build communication and language for your child. Please, talk with your child's health care professionals for more communication ideas.

Remember, communication and language are important in the interaction between parent and child. The development of language and other skills begins with communication. This early groundwork of language then helps the child learn reading and writing in school, as well as social skills. The gift of language will open doors for you and your child and will help your child build communication skills that will last a lifetime.

Families as Decision Makers

Experience shows that there is no one best intervention choice for all children. Just because a method of communication works well for one child and his or her family does not mean it will be the best choice for every other child and family. Finding the best choice for your child often is a complex process. It can involve getting information about the different educational programs over time, as well as watching your child closely to see how he or she is doing. You may need to try out a communication approach to decide if it is a good fit for your child. Some children start and continue with just one educational program or a set of communication strategies. Other children might change programs to have the best opportunity to develop language and communication skills. You understand your own child the best. Therefore, with the guidance of professionals and others, you should make your own decisions about language and communication choices.