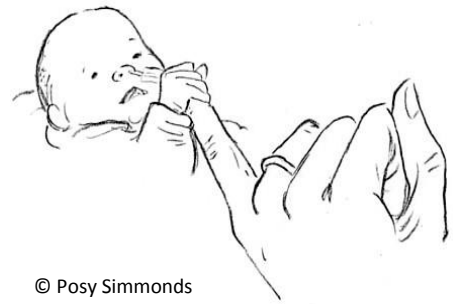


# Talk To Your Baby: for parents of babies who are born prematurely

## Talking to your baby will make a difference

Talking and listening to children from the moment they are born helps them develop good language and communication skills.

Most brain development occurs from birth to age two, so babies and toddlers need stimulation. The best way to stimulate babies' brains is to talk to them more.



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When a child is born prematurely, he might spend a few days, weeks or months in the neonatal unit. Talking and communicating with your baby from day one will help the two of you get to know each other, and gives your child a great start in life. The stimulation of your voice and if possible, your contact, will help your baby develop and bond with you in the early days.

Premature babies will get tired more quickly and sleep often – very premature babies might sleep up to 20 hours a day. But there are lots of opportunities to communicate and listen to your baby; remember, you don't have to be talking all the time to be communicating. Touch, eye contact and facial expressions are all ways of communicating that will help stimulate your baby and help you bond.

You don't need to be an expert to help your child develop good communication skills. All you need is a listening ear and the willingness to chat to your child whenever you can.

Babies can communicate before they start talking and want to interact with people, especially family. As soon as your baby is born she can hear and recognise the sound of your voice. From birth your baby is listening, so keep talking.

## Talking Tips

- Kangaroo Care<sup>1</sup> is when your baby is placed skin-to-skin on your chest, and the contact will help to form a bond between you. Talk quietly and take time to listen to her – if she makes noises try to respond to her, or if she is calm you can also use the time to be quiet and relax with her.
- As time passes and when you are ready, care staff will encourage and support you to do some of the routine tasks such as nappy changing and tube feeding. This is a great time to talk to your baby. Take your time and talk to him about what you are doing, or sing to him as you are doing it. It doesn't matter if you don't think you can sing as your baby will love to hear your voice.
- When your baby makes noises or little cooing sounds, listen and have a conversation by copying her sounds and taking turns.
- When your baby is very small he will like to grasp your finger and enjoy the feeling of your hands on his body. Call him by his name as the sound of your voice will help relax and soothe him. You could also introduce family members.
- As the weeks go by, your baby will look at you for longer and see your face more clearly. Smile and respond to your baby, but remember that it takes a lot of effort for him to concentrate, so try to avoid distracting him with lights or noise.
- As your baby grows and gets stronger she will be able to have a bath. This is a great time to bond, as your baby will need your reassurance and voice to help her feel safe, especially the first time.
- It's never too early to read a story! Sometimes this helps if you are also feeling tired. Choose a simple baby book and read; your voice will help him relax and fall asleep.
- Like adults, babies don't always feel like being sociable, especially if hungry, tired or uncomfortable, and premature babies will get tired more quickly. If she starts to hiccough, look away or yawn, these are signs she needs to rest.
- Games are a great way to talk together. You don't need any toys; just each other. As your baby gets stronger count your baby's toes, play tickling games or peek-a-boo.



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<sup>1</sup> For more information on Kangaroo Care, feeding, comfort holding and other publications visit [www.bliss.org.uk](http://www.bliss.org.uk)

**Originally created by the National Literacy Trust for the Talk To Your Baby Campaign.** With support from **Bliss**, a charity that provides vital support and care to premature and sick babies across the UK and their families. Visit [www.bliss.org.uk](http://www.bliss.org.uk)