

# Talk to Your Baby: for parents and carers of deaf children

## Talking and listening will make a difference

Talking and listening to children from the moment they are born helps them develop good language and communication skills. This enables them to communicate and express themselves well. It also helps them to learn and develop good relationships.

If your baby is diagnosed deaf, talking to him is still vital – it is part of the way YOU communicate and it's never too early to start sharing that.



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An essential first step is the willingness to chat and communicate whenever you can. This resource provides tips and techniques to use with your child that will help enhance his/her learning and also help you to bond with each other.

All babies communicate before they start talking and want to interact with people, especially family. Most brain development occurs in the first two years, so stimulation is crucial for your child and communicating helps her to make sense of the world and her surroundings. By moving her mouth or limbs, cooing, babbling or smiling, your baby is sharing experiences with you and looking for a response. Deafness is no barrier to this type of communication.

With a deaf baby you need to do all the things you would with a hearing baby and a bit more! The important thing is to try to make sure that your baby understands what you say.

## Language, talking and reading

It is easy to think that language is the same as speech, but it's not. Language is the words (or signs) we use in our heads – we think in 'language'. We can only communicate in spoken language if we can think in words and in the sounds within words. This is also an important part of learning to read.

<sup>1</sup> This resource uses the term 'deaf' to refer to people across the whole range of hearing loss

## How can I help my deaf child learn to communicate?

All forms of communicating are important such as eye contact, body language, gurgles, kicks and facial expressions like smiling, so always try to respond to them. Depending on their hearing loss, some babies may understand most of your speech if they use hearing aids or a cochlear implant and this might be enough for them to learn to talk in the same way as a hearing child. Make this easy for them by turning off the TV and radio and putting their aids on as much as possible – then talk as you would to a hearing child. If your baby has a hearing aid and still can't hear all the sounds of speech, always use it anyway. It can take several months to get used to listening through an aid – so keep using it.



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Your baby may need some extra support in addition to a hearing aid or cochlear implant to fully understand you. Your baby may not hear all the sounds of speech through his hearing aid or you might not know what he can hear; you might not know yet how successful the implant will be or he might be waiting for an implant.

The National Deaf Children's Society identifies three main ways of communicating with your child:

- **Listening and speaking** (Auditory-Oral or Oral / Aural)
- **Sign language as a first language** (Sign-Bilingual)
- **Using a combination of methods flexibly** – sign, speech and hearing, fingerspelling, gesture, facial expression and lipreading (Total Communication)

Visit their website for more information and resources: <http://www.ndcs.org.uk/>

Talking to your child can fit easily into your daily routine. Talk about the things you see when you're on the bus or walking to the shops. Chat to your baby when you dress him, or recite a nursery rhyme while changing his nappy.

### Talking tips

- Talk to your deaf child when you're playing together.
- Have fun with nursery rhymes and songs, especially those with actions, clapping and sounds.
- If your child has a hearing aid, encourage her to wear it and listen to different sounds, especially those which are close to her. This will help her listening skills.
- Listen carefully and give your child time to communicate. Take turns.
- Always respond in some way when she says something.

- Gain your child's attention when you want to talk, and make sure that she can see you clearly. Try to make sure there is light on your face and that your faces are on the same level.
- Limit TV time. Try to watch TV together so you can talk about what happens.
- Keep background noise (for example radios and music) to a minimum.

## Further information and resources

### British Sign Language

Sign language is a language and if your child learns it he can think in sign language and communicate with others who use sign language. It uses visual and spatial signs with different grammatical rules to those of English. It was recognised as an official British language in 2003, has regional dialects and differs from sign languages in different countries. Visit [www.bda.org.uk](http://www.bda.org.uk)

### Cued Speech

Cued Speech is a simple sound-based system which uses eight handshapes in four different positions (cues) in combination with the natural lip-patterns of speech, to make all the sounds of spoken language clearly understandable to deaf and hearing-impaired people of all ages. Visit [www.cuedspeech.co.uk](http://www.cuedspeech.co.uk)



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### Makaton

Makaton can be very useful although it is not a substitute for a full language such as English (possibly clarified through Cued Speech) or British Sign Language. It is a language programme offering a structured, multi-modal approach for the teaching of communication, language and literacy skills and was devised for children and adults with a variety of communication and learning disabilities. Visit [www.makaton.org](http://www.makaton.org)

### NDCS (National Deaf Children's Society)

The NDCS is a national charity dedicated to creating a world without barriers for deaf children and young people. It offers a wide range of services, support and information for parents. Visit [www.ndcs.org.uk](http://www.ndcs.org.uk)

### RNID (Royal National Institute for Deaf People)

RNID is a charity which aims to achieve a better quality of life for those who are deaf or hard of hearing. It offers services and information and also lobbies to change government laws and policies. Visit [www.rnid.org.uk](http://www.rnid.org.uk)