

Talk To Your Baby: for parents and carers of children who have visual impairments

It will make a difference

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



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All you need is a listening ear and the willingness to chat whenever you can. This resource provides tips and techniques targeting the other senses to use with your child that will help enhance their learning process and also help you to bond with each other.

A child with visual impairments uses other senses to help her to learn. Communication and language is vital to the learning process, giving names, concepts and understanding to what she hears, touches, smells and tastes.

Most brain development is 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.

Help your child learn about the environment around them

A child with vision can see a man banging on a drum, hear the sound and link the cause-effect. A child with visual impairments can hear the sound, but needs the environment brought to him to help learn what the cause is. He will have a sensory memory and will build up 3D images rather than pictorial ones. Communicating and talking contributes to building up understanding and linking the cause-effect.



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How can I help my child learn to communicate?

Children with visual impairments will be more sensitive to sound, touch, taste and smell. They might not respond to you quite as quickly as a sighted child would, but they are certainly just as inquisitive and keen to learn!

Your voice is a powerful tool, and your child will be very aware of the different tones you use which convey meaning. Try to use your voice to convey emotion, and keep it calm and gentle.

Getting down to your child's level will help her engage more easily with you and give her an awareness of where you are. Introducing yourself when you come into a room and stating when you are leaving also gives her confidence in knowing who is around her.

Children with visual impairments learn a great deal through using their hands and touch. Letting them touch your face, and naming the parts of the face helps with learning the concept of the body, which are often among the first words.

Placing your child's hand on your face so it is near your nose and lips on one side, will help give a sense of what happens when someone talks. He will feel the vibrations through your face, and also become aware of the different lip shapes when pronouncing words such as the subtle difference between a 'p' and 'b'.

It's never too early to start talking to your child. Babies can communicate before they start talking and want to interact with people, especially family. By moving her mouth or limbs, cooing, babbling or smiling, she is sharing experiences with you and looking for a response. Toddlers will use some words to communicate with you, but they understand far more than they can say. By talking and listening to them you will motivate them to keep talking, which will improve their language skills.



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Talking Tips

- Give sounds and noises an explanation. Remember your child won't have seen what caused the noise. For example, it could be a dog barking, a door slamming, a doorbell ringing, or a clock ticking. If an aeroplane passes over and you can hear the engine, say, "oh, listen to that aeroplane". Do the same if there is a smell in the environment.

- Use coactive movements. Place your hand on your child's whilst he is doing a movement and talk through what you are doing. For example, when he is having a drink, guide his actions and tell him he is having a drink.



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- Children with visual impairments will be much more alert to vibrations. Using a drum or beach ball, she will feel the sensation of the vibration. Take turns to use the drum or beach ball, and do it together. This will help her learn the concept of turn-taking in conversation.
- At mealtimes, introduce food, the textures, smell and taste. Talk about the food and if it feels hard, soft or lumpy. All the while, you are building vocabulary and helping to give your child a sense of what they will be eating without being able to see it.
- Let your child initiate conversation. Giving options is important so he gets to choose and think. If he initiates something, for example reaching out for an object, praise him and talk about it. This will encourage him to be active in his discovery.
- Encourage your baby to look at you when she is communicating. This might not come naturally to her, as her sight is impaired, but it helps to develop social interaction skills and will quickly become habitual, making it easier to engage with others.
- Encourage smiling, and praise your child when he smiles. He will hear a smile in your voice. By telling him how nice it is, you are reinforcing social skills and ability to communicate his mood.
- Imitating your baby's noises, such as blowing raspberries and kissing noises encourages her to develop oral motor skills. It helps with development for making speech sounds and encourages turn-taking.

Further information

Booktouch is a free pack of books and guidance materials that aims to give a love of books to blind and partially sighted children of 0-4 years. Visit

<http://www.bookstart.org.uk/about/packs/additional-needs/>

Clearvision Project is a UK postal lending library of mainstream children's books with added braille. Visit www.clearvisionproject.org

The RNIB has resources and advice for parents of blind children. Visit:

<http://www.rnib.org.uk/children-young-people-and-families/resources-parents-blind-or-partially-sighted>