



Communication



Infant and Child Development

An early start to a bright future

What is Language?

Language is the words we use to talk and understand each other. Your child is learning two forms of language:

1. Receptive Language – Understanding what others say using words or gestures. (Knowing what “Put on your shoes” means).
2. Expressive Language – Expressing thoughts and wants with words and gestures (“I want juice”, or “Look at the dog”).

What is Social Communication?

Social communication is how we use language and how we connect with others using our body and voice in social situations. These include:

- Gestures
 - waving, high 5, pointing.
 - smiling with eye contact.
- Body movements (reaching for a ball, touching your face).
- Words and sounds (baba, dada).



Why Do Children Communicate?

Most babies start to talk because they:

- Tell you they want or need something.
- Want to connect with someone they love.
- Show you something (such as bird/plane).

Babies start to communicate from birth using:

- Sounds (crying, cooing, squealing).
- Faces (smiling, looking at you, frowning).
- Movements (kicking legs when happy, pointing when older).

Most children learn more when adults respond by:

- Replying and copying sounds.
- Smiling and comforting.
- Helping them get what they want.
- Talking and singing.

You are the best person to help your child talk because:

- You spend the most time with your child.
- Your child feels safe and happy with you.
- You know what your child likes, so talking can be fun.
- You can help your child learn during everyday things like playing, eating, and dressing.



Communication Milestones by Age

Age	By this age your child may begin to...
6 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Turn to sound• Smile and laugh in response to interaction• Begin imitating simple sounds (cooing and vowel sounds)
9 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Respond to their name• Understand “no”• Enjoy social games (peek-a-boo)• Make babbling sounds (baba, gaga)
12 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Follow simple one-step directions• Say 3 or more words• Use gestures and sounds
18 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Say at least 20 words• Point to 3 body parts• Begin pretend play (feed a doll)• Respond to simple questions (“where’s teddy?”)



Communication Milestones by Age (cont'd)

Age	By this age your child may begin to...
24 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Say 100+ words• Follow two-step directions (“find teddy and show Grandma”)• Be understood by others about half the time• Use at least 2 pronouns (“me,” “mine”)• Say 2+ words in phrases (“daddy hat”)
30 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Say 350+ words, combining two or three words (“two cookies,” “I jumped”)• Understand basic concepts (big/little, in/out, hot/cold)• Show empathy and take turns in play
3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Say long sentences and talks about past events• Understand questions (who, what, where, why, how)• Be understood by most people
4 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Speak in full sentences and tells stories• Be clearly understood by unfamiliar adults• Use language to create rhymes

Note: For a complete list of communication milestones, please scan the QR code.



Early Communication Strategies for Young Children

Face-to-Face

Why It Helps:

- Helps your child see and understand you.

How to Do It:

- Be at their level so they can see you.
- Hold toys beside your face to get their attention.
- Watch and comment on their reactions.



Follow Their Lead

Why It Helps:

- Shows you care.

How to Do It:

- Let them choose what to play.
- Talk about what they are doing.
- Make play fun by adding noises, sounds, or word.



Early Communication Strategies for Young Children

Join In and Play

Why It Helps:

- Builds connection and language.

How to Do It:

- Let your child choose the toy.
- Copy their play with your own toy.
- Show new ways to play.



Wait

Why It Helps:

- Encourages children to respond.
- Builds confidence in speaking, gesturing.

How to Do It:

- Say something, then pause and wait.
- Allow 5-10 seconds for your child to respond with a sound, gesture, or word.



Early Communication Strategies for Young Children

Imitate

Why It Helps:

- Connection.
- Encourages copying and learning.

How to Do It:

- Copy your child's sounds, words, and actions (tap if your child taps, clap if they clap).
- Repeat using the correct word.



Talk During Daily Life

Why It Helps:

- Teaches useful words and ideas.

How to Do It:

- Name things, describe what you are doing, and repeat words often.
- Use simple and useful words (help, more).
- Use comments more than questions.



Early Communication Strategies for Young Children

Take Turns

Why It Helps:

- Builds back-and-forth communication.

How to Do It:

- Take turns talking and making sounds.
- Take turns during games (rolling a car or playing peek a boo).



Give a Reason to Talk

Why It Helps:

- Helps children use words and gestures.

How to Do It:

- Offer two items, wait to see if your child shows you they want one.
- Put items slightly out of reach so your child must ask for it.



Early Communication Strategies for Young Children

Books, Songs & Rhymes

Why It Helps:

- Makes learning fun and builds vocabulary.



How to Do It:

- Talk about pictures and real-life objects.
- Sing songs with actions “Row, row, row your boat”, “Wheels on the bus”, “Head and shoulders”.

Tip: Repeat and Wait – The two most powerful tools for language development!

Learning More Than One Language Is Great!

How You Can Help:

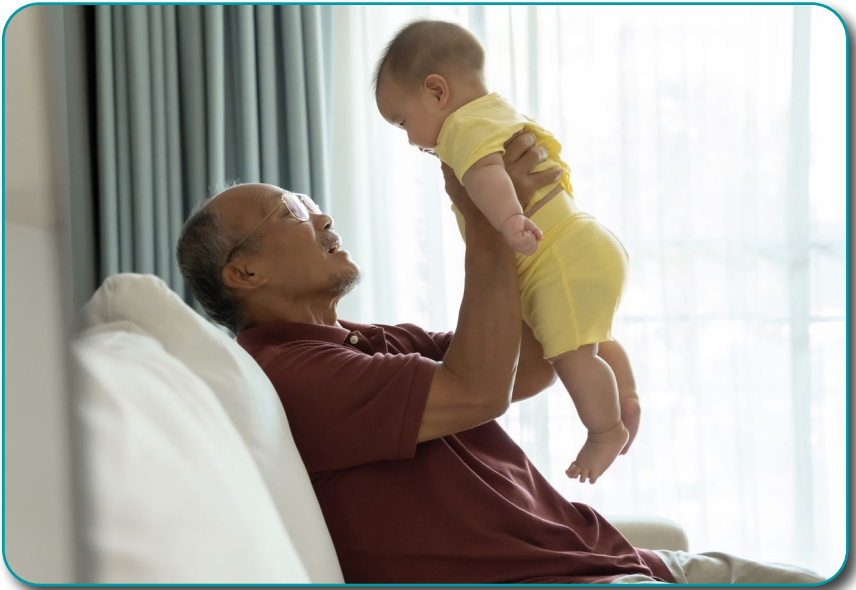
- Speak the language you are most comfortable with at home.
- If they are having trouble in all languages, talk to a speech-language pathologist (SLP).
- Talk, play, and have fun—this helps build strong language skills!
- If your child finds one language hard, they may just need more practice.

Concerned About Your Child's Communication?

Some children are more likely to have speech or language delays.

This includes children who:

- Have a family history of speech or language concerns.
- Were born early (before 37 weeks).
- Have serious health issues.
- Were exposed to alcohol, substances or certain medications during pregnancy or breastfeeding.
- Had complications during pregnancy or birth.
- Have a developmental disability.



Who Can Help?

- [Infant and Child Development](https://durham.ca/infantdevelopment)
durham.ca/infantdevelopment
- [Grandview Kids](https://grandviewkids.ca/about-us/)
https://grandviewkids.ca/about-us/
- [Speech-language pathologists](https://www.sac-oac.ca/) help with talking, understanding, and swallowing.
https://www.sac-oac.ca/
- [Audiologists](https://www.caslpo.com/) help with hearing and balance.
https://www.caslpo.com/



HEALTH
DEPARTMENT

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Durham Health Connection Line
905-668-2020 or 1-800-841-2729
durham.ca/infantdevelopment
Dial 311 (within regional limits)



If you require this information in an accessible format, contact 1-800-841-2729