

Helping your baby to listen is part of what every parent does, without even thinking about it. We naturally use a different style to talk with babies, lots of repetition, nonsensical noises, lilting voice and rhythm, exaggerated facial expressions. All of these work to attract the baby's attention – to get them listening rather than just hearing. Most babies respond even before they start to make noises, they wave their arms around, make faces – or smile – back. It's usually clear that adult and baby are having a conversation – even if neither are too sure what it's about. Once babies are listening and responding like this, then they gradually begin to make sense of what they hear and start to experiment with noises themselves. The more they listen as they grow, the more they understand and the more they babble and then talk.

A baby with a hearing aid is still not hearing as a child without a hearing aid will, the sounds are less distinct and that makes it more difficult to distinguish between one sound and another. So they need more, not less, chances to learn what it's all about.

Talking with a deaf baby is like talking with any baby,

- Get up close at first. Babies like to see as well as hear and your facial expressions help to emphasise the message you're giving.
- Use eye-to-eye contact. Babies use their eyes to give messages like we do. They will look at a toy and you will say 'Oh, do you want your teddy?' giving them the words that link to what they're focused on.

- Talk about lots of things. Your voice communicates your feelings, long before baby understands the words, and lets baby know that you want to chat and that this is important for both of you. This helps bonding as well as communication.
- Don't worry what you are talking about. It will probably be about feeding and changing and everyday routines, exactly what babies need to hear. Hearing the words which are about what they are experiencing at that precise moment is how all babies gradually come to understand what the words mean. So all that chat about 'Do you want... are you hungry... isn't this a nice bath?' is never wasted. Talking about the same things everyday isn't boring for the baby and it becomes automatic and not really boring for you. The repetition helps understanding and develops a feeling of security.
- Don't talk continuously. Leave space to suggest that it is baby's turn, to let baby know you expect a response. You might need to leave a little extra time for the baby to receive and think about the sound. Respond to baby's response for him to know that you like what he has done.

- Try singing rhymes, silly songs or whatever songs you like currently. It will be rhythmic and tuneful and just the sort of sounds babies like to listen to. It can be any song that you enjoy. Later it is useful to introduce nursery rhymes, action rhymes and traditional children's songs.

What's special about talking with a deaf baby?

Hearing aids pick up the sound closest to them best of all. As your baby is young you are likely to be cuddling them, picking him up and generally being very close to that microphone so you will be giving them lots of interesting speech sounds through the aids.

Being at home is usually quieter than elsewhere because of the carpets and furniture absorbing noise. But it is especially difficult for a deaf baby learning to use the hearing aids and to listen when there's lots of competing background noise, like the TV, radio or washing machine, so make sure that some of your chatting time is in a quiet place.

Remember you don't need to shout. Just use normal voice levels as the hearing aids will make the sound louder. Use the tuneful, 'more rhythmic' voice that we all naturally use when we chat to any baby.

Other members of the family, friends and childminders need to understand all this too. Their different voices are useful in helping the baby's listening skills develop.

Signed Communication

Parents who have opted to use a Total Communication approach or British Sign Language (BSL) need to be communicating with their infant or young child immediately and can do this using gesture and the signs they know. It is not so much the quality of the sign that matters at this early stage as the quality of the communication itself. Both parents and child need a great deal of intuitive interaction such as cuddles and other expressions of pleasure and feelings. In the conversing and interacting with a young baby or child, the whole family needs to join in too.

Routine activities to promote language development include: -

- Bath time
- Food preparation
- Meal times (all the family)
- Going for a walk
- Washing, teeth cleaning and dressing (zips, buttons, Velcro etc)
- Meeting the family and friends, visitors, postman, milkman, salesman.
- Playing with toys, cars, dolls, teddy, puzzles etc.
- Playing shops/house
- Playing 'who's that knocking on the door/ringing the bell?'
- Singing and other musical activities.

It is also important to emphasise the value of sharing books and, through books, developing early literacy and numeracy skills. It is not only communicative language that is needed upon school entry but basic literacy and numeracy skills too.

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MERTHYR TYDFIL
County Borough Council

Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol
MERTHYR TUDFUL

**PRE-SCHOOL
COMMUNICATION
WITH YOUR DEAF
CHILD**

LEARNING DEPARTMENT

Adran Dysgu

Contact number

Learning Department
Civic Centre
Merthyr Tydfil
CF47 8AN
Tel: - 01685 724642

Useful ICT Websites/Organisations

www.rnid.org.uk

www.ndcs.org.uk

www.batod.org.uk

www.cafamily.org.uk

www.deafeducation.org.uk

www.sense.org.uk

www.bda.org.uk

www.signcommunity.org.uk

Merthyr Talking Hands-01685384198

Useful Publications

Using residual hearing effectively

Effective inclusion of deaf pupils into
mainstream

Guidelines for mainstream teachers with deaf
pupils in their class

Promoting literacy in deaf pupils

Promoting numeracy in deaf pupils

NDCS

Deaf Friendly Nurseries

Deaf Friendly Schools

Deaf Friendly Teaching