

chapter 3:

communicating from the beginning

OFF TO A POSITIVE START

You can do many things to make sure your child gets off to the best possible start with their communication development. Even before you have made decisions about hearing aids, early intervention services and how you will support their communication development, you can do some simple, loving actions.

Sharing quiet moments together is important. Babies enjoy the intimacy of being close and looking at people. They also learn about people and themselves as they do this.

Use speech, touch and facial expression to communicate with your baby. It's instinctive to comment when your baby moves or makes sounds, and it's exactly the right thing to do. For example, if your baby burps, you might say 'do you feel better now?' Touch is a very important part of early communication – strokes, tickles and cuddles all encourage your baby to be aware of you and their enjoyment of being with you and listening to you.

TALKING, LISTENING AND PLAYING

Here are some tips to encourage enjoyable interactions between you and your baby. The Choices booklet has further tips on communicating with your baby.

Consider the environment...

- Position your baby so that they can see you as much as possible.
- Move away from or reduce background noise so your child has the best chance of hearing you talking to them.
- Reduce the distance between you and your baby when you're talking to them. Come even closer when it's noisy.
- Make sure the room has good lighting.

Understand your baby...

- Watch and think about your baby's behaviours.
- Spend time in close face-to-face interaction with your baby.
- Copy the sounds your baby makes.
- Use your voice, movement and touching to gain your baby's attention...

- Make your voice fun to listen to. Use lots of facial expression – your baby will be interested in the movement of your face, eyes and lips as you speak and play.
- Use child-directed speech or sign in response to your baby's behaviours, e.g. using repetition (speech, touching), varied intonation, facial expression and head movements.
- Try singing while feeding or changing your baby.
- Rock your baby rhythmically to songs, music and in good-night routines.
- As you walk around with your baby, comment on the different sounds in the area.
- Use simple songs and reassuring tones to soothe your baby.
- Talk to your baby during daily routines such as feeding and changing.
- Gently touch your baby; stroke their cheek or kiss their tummy. Talk as you do this and be aware of how your baby shows their enjoyment of this close physical contact.

CHILDREN WHO HAVE A UNILATERAL HEARING LOSS

Children who have a hearing loss in just one ear can benefit from all the above ideas, but other things are also useful for their specific needs.

- Position your baby so that their ear with the better hearing is directed towards the sounds you want them to hear.
- Place furniture such as cots and high chairs away from background noise and in a position to take advantage of their better hearing ear.
- Place your baby's car seat on the opposite side of the car to their better hearing ear.
- Make sure your baby is seated so more interesting sounds come to their better hearing ear.

Reference

Early Support Program, 2006, 'Development cards', viewed January 2008, <http://www.earlysupport.org.uk/modResourcesLibrary/StreamRenderer/Development%20cards%20deaf%20children%20Aug%202006.pdf>.



QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT WHEN CHOOSING A COMMUNICATION APPROACH...

- What are our main goals for our child's communication?
- How clearly do we understand the different methods, and where can we get further information if necessary?
- What are the important things to consider when choosing a method of communication for our child?
- If we decide a communication style is not working, what can we do to look at other options?

Other parents say:

- Explore all options at your own pace so you fully understand the differences between communication options and go with your gut instinct
- This is a very personal decision which can be the result of much research and agonising. Even though you may have doubts, please know that you will make the right decision for your family situation.
- Look at what suits your child, your family, and your life.
- If you can, talk to other parents who are already in the early intervention program and ask them what they think about it.
- Remember that you may change your mind as you see what is working well for your particular child's personality and aptitude.