

From early on, children learn that their needs can be met with different vocalizations. By three months of age, a baby will cry differently for different needs. When those needs are met, the baby begins to associate that their voice results in their needs being met. That is communication!



Transitioning from crying and other vocal noises to spoken words can be difficult for some children. Speech requires greater motor coordination as the lips, tongue, and jaw need to move in the right ways to make words.

There are different ways to help a child develop their verbal language skills. Follow the tips below, and consult with your child's speech-language pathologist for other recommendations.

## Slow Down

Life can get hectic, but it's important to slow down and *talk* to a child. They are picking up language every part of the day. Taking the time to slow down and talk to them during daily routines, such as bathing, dressing, and meals at the dinner table, will help the child learn. Also, make sure to slow down your own speech. If you are talking too fast, a child will have a harder time learning speech and language skills.

## Get Low

In addition to slowing down, get down to a child's level and communicate face to face. This helps the child focus on your message and the movements of your face and mouth. If you are helping a child label an object, bring the object close to your face as you model the word.

## Model

Provide a good model for a child to learn speech and language. Short, simple words and phrases are easier for them to understand. Repeat key words so your child hears it multiple times. For example, "Doggie. Big doggie. Run doggie."

## Wait

It's understandable to want to fill a child's needs immediately. However, if the child is reaching for a desired object, wait a few seconds to give them a chance to *say* what they want. If they don't say the word, then provide a model of the word while you give them the object. Repeat this whenever the child gestures for an item.

## Praise

Praise the child when they attempt to communicate verbally! Even if you weren't able to understand their message, praising the child will encourage them to continue verbal communication.