

Exploring with and enjoying your new baby!

- Be sure the environment is visually stimulating for your baby. Not too many things to look at, but enough to ensure interest and curiosity.
- Spend time looking into your baby's face and encouraging your baby to look at you - first interactions. Interestingly, as we hold infants in our arms and stare into their eyes, their eyes learn to register and focus on our faces -- it is nature's way of setting that distance just right. They begin to focus on your mouth as you talk. Your baby needs to see different mouth postures in order to know what to do with his own mouth for speech.
- Play sound games with your baby. Especially just to hear the sounds.
- Peek-a-boo and pattycake are fun early interactive games!
- Make the environment rich with sound, such as playing music. Allow quiet-time for natural sound, too.
- Connect sounds with the sources. For example, make animal sounds, then ask, "What sound does a cow make?" Then again say, "Mooooo!" Don't expect your child to join in the sound play for several months, but usually before twelve months, she will try to imitate animal sounds.
- Avail different sound producing toys and objects so your baby hears different environmental sounds.
- Call your child by name consistently. If he does not respond, attract his attention with a desirable noise, then call his name again.
- Encourage mouth exploration by providing a variety of safe materials to put in the mouth, such as teething beads, wet wash clothes, different textured food substances as age appropriate, etc. Always keep safety into consideration. While bottle feeding or nursing, give liquids of different thickness, such as water and juice vs. milk. Remember while eating, your baby is developing mouth muscles that will eventually be used for speech.
- Gently massaging lips, cheeks, and chin helps draw awareness to these oral structures.
- Sometimes tapping the tongue to rhythmical music increases tongue movement.
- Sometimes stroking the tongue encourages the child to make a groove in the middle or to move it sideways or upward.
- Encourage mouth posture imitation by looking in mirrors together or facing each other at close proximity. Imitate what she does, then try to model a posture for her to imitate.
- Encourage imitation of sounds. At first, imitate sounds your baby makes. Then encourage him to imitate sounds you make. Encouraged by imitating his sounds first then slightly changing that sound.
- React to your baby's sounds as though there is meaning. Listen carefully, then when she is done, say something like "Oh you have a lot to say. Tell me more." Or "Wow! Did that really happen?"
- When speaking with your baby, use a high-pitched voice with short simple sentences. Talk slowly and repeat what you say. This is known as 'child-directed speech.' It is natural when talking to both babies and pets!

Have fun!

Form adapted by Kate Ross, MS, CCC-SLP, 2011. Developed from a book entitled: Communication Skills in Children with Down Syndrome: A Guide for Parents, By Libby Kumin, Ph.D., CCC-SLP. Woodbine House; Maryland: 1994.