

Communicating with your baby

Reading and responding to your baby's early communication cues

Long before babies can talk, they can communicate.

You can communicate with your baby by learning to recognize their communication cues and responding to their needs.

When you respond to your baby's cues consistently, you help them feel safe, bond with them sooner, and help build a positive self-esteem.

Your responses may include:

- picking up your baby
- talking
- smiling
- swaddling
- providing skin to skin contact
- changing their diaper
- helping them suck on their fingers, soother or your nipple
- feeding

You cannot spoil a child by picking them up when they are crying. When you respond to your baby, they learn that their efforts at communicating are successful which encourages them to communicate more.

“I’m ready” cues

Your baby demonstrates ‘ready’ or ‘invitation’ cues when they want to communicate. Observe your baby carefully. They will usually show invitation cues when quiet and alert.

Invitation cues include:

- focusing on your face or voice
- relaxing their body, arms and legs
- breathing slowly and regularly
- opening eyes widely (a ‘bright’ look)



As your baby matures, their quiet, alert periods will increase.

‘I’m not ready’ cues

Your baby will tell you when they are not ready to communicate or have had enough.

‘I’m not ready’ or ‘stress’ cues include:

- squirming
- relaxing or stiffening legs, arms or body
- arching their back
- looking away
- crying
- going to sleep suddenly
- moving in a disorganized way

You may also notice changes in your baby's breathing or their skin colour.

Communicating with a newborn baby

Very premature babies or babies who are ill often cannot tolerate both seeing a face and hearing a voice at the same time, or hearing a voice and being touched at the same time. You can tell because your baby will show stress cues. As your baby grows, they will learn to handle more stimulation.

Here is how you can practice communicating with your baby. If your baby is showing you ready cues, let your baby look at your face or hear your voice. Try speaking to your baby first, and then watch for their reaction. When your baby hears your voice, their eyes may brighten and they may turn their head to find you. At this point, they are ready to see your face.

Talking to your baby

Your baby is listening to all the sounds around them but will listen closely to your voice.

When your baby is upset and hears your voice, they may calm down. When your baby is showing ready cues, talk and sing to your baby. This helps your baby connect with you and gets your baby started on the path to learning language. The more you talk to them, the more this will help their language development. Tell your baby everything that is going on around them.

Here are some examples.

- Describe what you are doing.
“I’m getting you ready for your bath.”
- Talk about your day.
“It’s raining outside and mommy got wet, wet, wet.”
- Read children’s books.
- Sing children’s songs

It doesn’t really matter what you are talking about, it helps baby to hear your voice.