

Developing your child's communication skills

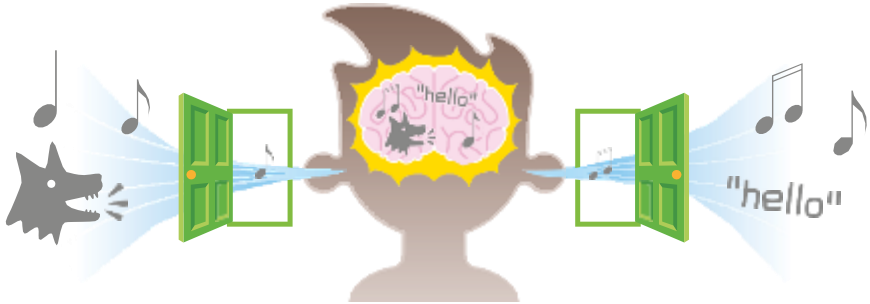
The ears: the doorway to your brain

Information for parents and carers who want their children to use spoken language to communicate.

The ears: the doorway to your brain

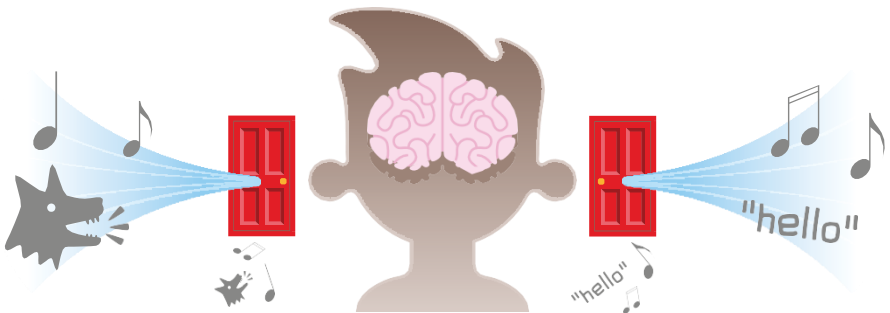
We tend to think that we hear with our ears, and that any hearing difficulties are only connected with this part of our body. But we actually hear with our **brain**. Our ears only help us to get sound to our brain.

We can compare ears to a doorway. We can think of hearing loss as a 'doorway problem', because the ears are the doorway to the brain for sound.



It's important to remember that:

- your ears are the doorway to your brain
- you listen and understand with your brain
- sound = auditory information = knowledge



The 'doorway' can have obstacles that get in the way a little or a lot. This means that sounds are not reaching the brain clearly.

Modern assistive listening devices are designed to break through these obstacles to deliver auditory information to the brain. These include:

- digital hearing aids
- bone conduction hearing aids
- behind-the-ear hearing aids

The brain uses information that is delivered via the ear doorway. Better quality information means stronger pathways are developed in the brain.

Studies show that for the best possible listening and spoken language outcome for a child, the ear (doorway) problem needs to be diagnosed and helped by technology as soon as possible.

Audiograms

An audiogram is a way of measuring the doorway problem to help us discover which technology will be best for your child, or if we should try to help them in a different way.

Your child's doorway problem might change over time, and this means that different management might be recommended as your child grows.

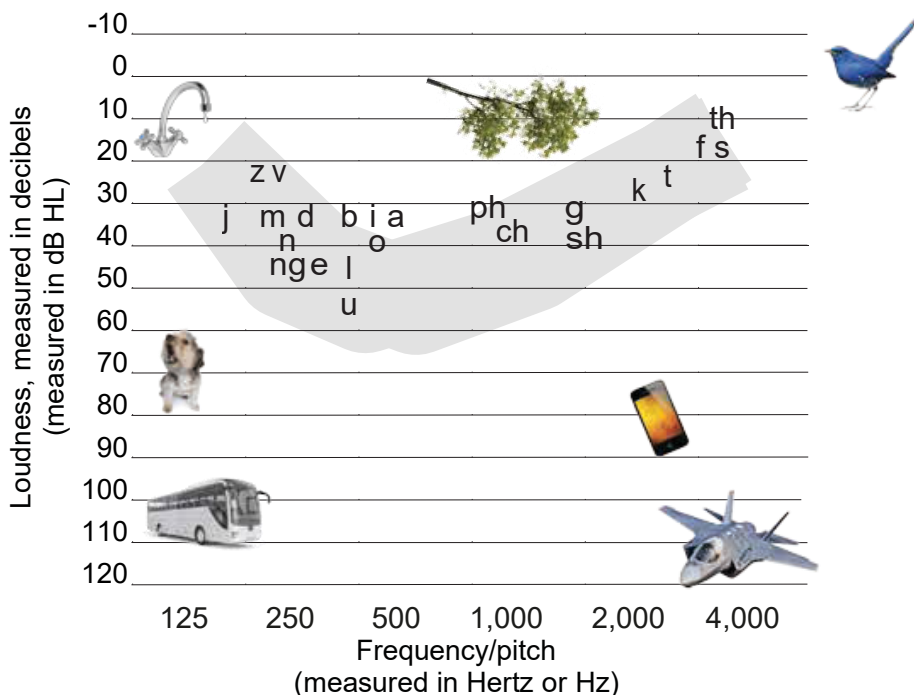
An audiogram is a visual representation used to record the results of hearing assessments.

Noises can be measured in 2 ways.

- Loudness is the volume of a noise
- Pitch (frequency) is how high or low the sound is

An example is that a plane in the sky isn't very loud and makes a very low sound. But, if you were beside that plane at an airport it would be much louder, but the pitch would be the same.

There is a grey curved line on an audiogram, and it's called a 'speech banana'. It covers lots of everyday sounds, but (most importantly) it covers the range where speech is heard. We want children to be able to hear as many speech sounds as possible.



Using technology

Eyes open, technology on!

Wearing technology helps to create the brain's foundation for listening, and spoken language. This also helps to support literacy. To give your child the best chance of learning to listen and develop spoken language, technology should be used as much as possible, ideally for 10 to 12 hours a day.

Night owl

If your baby is a night owl, put their technology on in those waking moments so that they can listen to your voice. If your baby has short naps in the day, leave their technology on (<https://www.hearingfirst.org/>)

Developing your child's brain

By working with your child, you can improve their auditory brain development. This will be the basis for improving their listening and spoken language skills, and their reading and writing. It will also help them as they go through school, and into work many years later.

Tips to help you stimulate your child's brain

It's important to talk with your child as much as possible. The amount of conversation you and your child have can have a huge impact on their speech and language development. Their brain needs to be activated, stimulated, and developed with as much spoken language as possible.

Try to make learning new words, and using language, fun rather than a lesson.

Tip	Example
Start 'turn-taking' conversations with your child from an early age and encourage them to use their voice	When your child makes a sound, such as 'baba', respond by making the same sound (remember to be face-to-face with your child)
Use clear speech and talk more slowly to your child.	Make sure that you sound the whole word, and make it clearly. (Adults usually speak faster than a child can process)
Use full sentences and a sing-song voice when you speak with your baby.	Read baby picture books. Use lots of repetition, such as 'Is it a cat? Look at the cats! Cats go meow'.
As your child gets older, introduce more-complex vocabulary and build your child's understanding.	Read story books every day. Introduce new words and explain what they mean. Use lots of different words, and expose your child to as many as possible.
Encourage your child to start putting words together.	If your child says 'Car', respond by saying, 'Yes, that's a red car.'
Ask open questions to encourage conversation.	Use why, what, where, how, and when questions to encourage them to say more than just 'yes' or 'no'.

<p>Talk to your child about activities as you are doing them.</p>	<p>Discuss what you have done during the day. For example, when dressing your child, say, 'Look, now you have your warm sock on'. Discuss what you're going to do during the day, and why. Do not worry if you end up repeating yourself. It will all help to build your child's listening and talking skills.</p>
<p>Use words that compare and contrast and explain them.</p>	<p>While you're playing with them, show and tell them that you can throw a ball up, to make it go high.</p>

Using games to develop your child's spoken language

Try these suggestions to build conversation.

- Build a tower of coloured blocks, and talk about each colour as you stack them. Use full sentences instead of single words.
- Play with a shape sorter, talking about each shape and repeating its name as you post them through the holes.
- Count out loud as you touch fingers and toes
- Play word games like I spy

Using singing to stimulate your child's brain

Singing with your child throughout the day is a workout for their entire brain. It stimulates both halves of their brain. Rhythm activates the right side of their brain, and words stimulate the left side.

Singing to your child teaches them how to hear and understand different sounds. Rhythm forms a critical foundation for reading. The foundation of reading is made up of rhythm, rhyme and repetition.

Tips for singing to your child

- Sing nursery rhymes, such as Twinkle, twinkle, little star, and Baa, baa, blacksheep.
- Use lots of different rhythms and pitches of your voice.
- Sing lots of different songs to expose your child to different words and tunes.
- As your child grows, start adding actions, pictures, or objects that your child can associate with the song.
- Play with basic musical instruments and highlight the difference between loud and quiet, fast and slow, and high and low pitches.

Do not worry if you think you cannot sing. Your baby or child will love your voice no matter how it sounds.

Reading to stimulate your child's brain

More parent-child conversations happen when you're reading aloud, than during any other activity.

Children who are frequently read to learn more than twice as many new words.

Reading aloud to children before they are 6 years old affects their language, literacy and reading development.

Try these suggestions to help stimulate your child's brain.

- Read aloud every day. Try to read 10 books each day. Start with picture books, build to storybooks and then novels.
- Establish a regular reading routine.
- Continue to read aloud to your child, even after they learn to read to themselves.
- It's best to read to your child slightly above their own reading level. Read chapter books to your child by the time they're aged 4.
- Talk to your child about the book, its pictures and covers.
- Have your child tell the story back to you in their own words.
- Try choosing a story, poem, or news story to grab your child's interest.
- Link a story to life and to other books.
- Go on an outing to your local library where you can borrow books.

- Look out for reading groups at your local library.
- Think about reading aloud as a conversation, not as a task to be completed.
- You can read the same book many times. Your child will still enjoy the pictures and stories.

Developing your child's second language skills

If your child will be speaking a second language (bilingual) exposing them to it as early as possible will help.

Tips for developing a second language

- Remember to use both languages. It's really important for you to teach your child your family language, because you're your child's first teacher.
- Try to go to baby groups and other classes where your child will also be exposed to each language they will learn.
- Sing songs and read books in both languages. Encourage older siblings to help, especially if they are already at school.
- You can help your child to develop a second language by singing in it (see the singing tips above).

Evelina London would like to thank Professor Carol Flexer and Phonak for their collaboration and help with the creation of this booklet.

Support and more information

National Deaf Children's Society, [web](http://www.ndcs.org.uk) www.ndcs.org.uk

Auditory Verbal UK,

[web](http://www.avuk.org/engaging-children-through-books) www.avuk.org/engaging-children-through-books

Books that you might find useful

Children with hearing loss: Developing listening and talking birth to six, by Elizabeth B Cole and Carol Flexer

Thirty million words: building a child's brain, by Dana Suskind

BookTrust: Getting Children Reading

Families in the UK with a baby under 12 months qualify for a free Bookstart Baby Pack. There's more information on their [website](http://www.booktrust.org.uk/how-we-help/parents-families/bookstart-baby-for-parents-and-carers/) www.booktrust.org.uk/how-we-help/parents-families/bookstart-baby-for-parents-and-carers/

Contact us

If you have any questions about your child's audiology care, please contact us, [phone](tel:02030498560) 020 3049 8560,

[email](mailto:gstt.cypacenquiries@nhs.net) gstt.cypacenquiries@nhs.net

Or you can search 'audiology service' on our

[web](http://www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk) www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk

For more information on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit [web](http://www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/leaflets) www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/leaflets

Evelina London Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your child's medicines, please speak to the staff caring for them or contact our helpline, **phone** 020 7188 3003, Monday to Friday, 10am to 5pm

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS), **phone** 020 7188 8801 **email** gstt.pals-gstt@nhs.net

Language and accessible support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please contact the service your child is seeing.

NHS 111

This service offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day, **phone** 111 **web** www.111.nhs.uk

NHS website

This website gives information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you take control of your health and wellbeing, **web** www.nhs.uk



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