

Paediatric Hearing Implant Programme

Supporting early communication skills

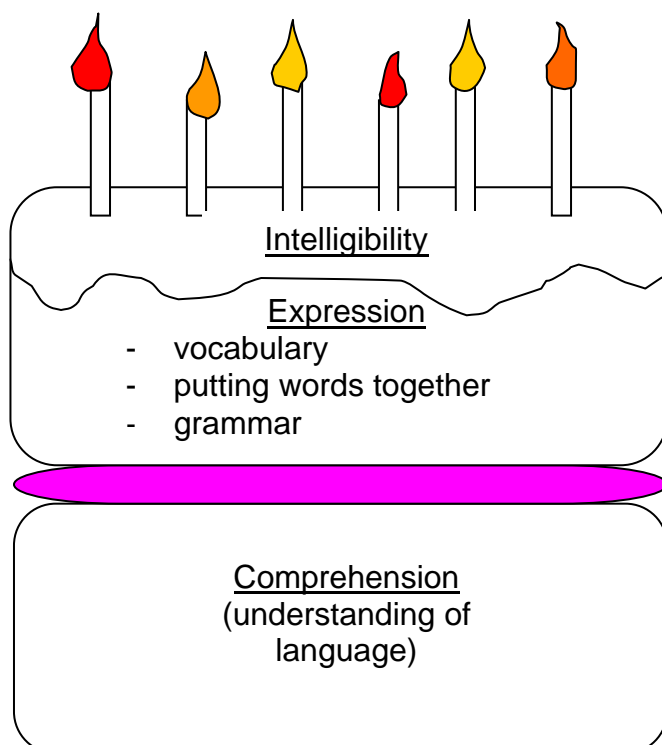
This leaflet explains more about early communication development and suggests ways in which you can help your child's communication skills to develop. It will be supported by explanations from your speech and language therapist and teacher of the deaf who will indicate which areas you should focus on at certain times.

What is communication?

Communication is the interaction between two or more people to share information, thoughts, feelings and needs. It is a two-way process that requires both parties to be active participants. Young children learn to communicate even before they learn to talk. They learn how to respond to things they see and hear in their environment, and can communicate using their eyes, facial expressions, gestures and noises.

Recipe for language

Language development is a continuous process that occurs in stages, starting first with the comprehension/understanding of language (the bottom layer of the cake), progressing on to the expression or use of language (the top layer of the cake) and finally the development of intelligible/understandable speech (the icing).



The ingredients needed to achieve this are:

- 1) Play development
- 2) Attention
- 3) Listening skills
- 4) Need/desire to communicate

This leaflet explains these different ingredients, and provides suggestions and ideas about how you can support your child to achieve them.

Play development

Why is play important?

Play is how children first begin to explore the world and discover how it works. It is also important for encouraging the skills that are necessary for later language development.

These skills include:

- a) attention
- b) listening
- c) symbolic understanding (the understanding that one thing can represent another)
- d) social skills (eye contact, turn-taking).

There are four stages of play development:

1. Exploratory play

At this stage, children explore objects using all their senses of touch, taste, sight, smell and sound. They will enjoy toys and objects that have different textures, shapes, sizes and colours.

2. Imaginative play

At this stage toys become the focus of play. They are interesting and fun to play with and also help children to understand the concept of symbols – that one thing can be represented by another. For example, that a toy car represents a real car. When children understand that toys represent real objects or events, we call this symbolic development. Symbolic development is the basis of language learning – learning that words or signs represent real objects and events. In imaginative play, children first learn to play with big toys (for example, teddy with a tea set), then small toys (for example, a doll's house and dolls), and finally make believe play without toys.

3. Social play

This type of play involves other people and is a two-way process. It is through social play that children learn the social skills that form the basis for communication such as eye contact, turn taking, sharing and copying. Games such as rolling a ball back and forth between two people can be thought of as a non-verbal conversation, with each person taking a turn with something of shared interest.

4. Games with rules

Play at this stage is dependent on the child having developed social play and an understanding of how to play within a set of rules. Examples include 'Tag/It' and 'Farmer's in his Den'.

Best approach to play with your child

Children will want to play with you in different ways depending on the stage their play skills are at. As parents it is important to think about which is the most appropriate way to support your child's play. The following step-by-step approach may be a useful guide on how to do this.

Observe



Imitate



Join In



Extend

1. Observe

In the early stages, some children find attempts by adults to join in their play intolerable.

Therefore, the first stage of play with your child should involve merely observing what they are doing and offering a running commentary.

2. Imitate

Use similar toys to your child and play within their sight, copying their movements and activities.

If children are not engaged with an object, and are running to and fro, don't offer an activity to them. Copy their actions and offer a running commentary instead.

3. Join in

Sit slightly closer to your child, and play the same game as them, in exactly the way they are playing it. Try joining in their game. If they are lining up cars, put one of your cars in the line. If they tolerate this, continue; but if not, go back to imitating. Talk about what your child is doing.

4. Extend

Once a child is able to tolerate an adult's presence in a game, it may be possible to extend the child's play. You can demonstrate ways of doing the same activity with different objects. For

example, pouring sand can be extended to pouring water or rice. You can also demonstrate new ways of playing with the same objects. For example, if your child is lining up bricks, you can demonstrate 'tower bricks' by placing bricks on top of their line of bricks.

Attention skills

As with play skills, there are also stages of attention skills that your child will pass through. However, your child's attention skills will function at different levels depending on the situation. Having a good understanding of your child's attention skills will help you to adjust your expectations about what they can do and how you can help them to move on.

Stages of attention development

Stage 1

Children are easily distracted and their attention flits from one thing to another (for example, from one noise to another noise, to someone walking past).

Stage 2

Children can concentrate on a task they have chosen for some time, but find it hard to cope with adult interference. They are still easily distracted.

Stage 3

Children cannot listen and play at the same time. Attention is still single channelled, but with adult help children can focus on another person or an instruction and then focus back on their activity again.

Stage 4

Attention is still single channelled but children can shift their attention between an activity and another person or instruction on their own, without adult help.

Stage 5

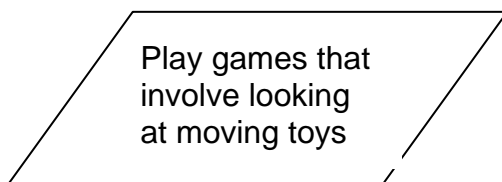
Children can take in verbal instructions related to an activity without needing to look up at the speaker. This requires the child to have adequate listening skills.

How can we improve attention skills?

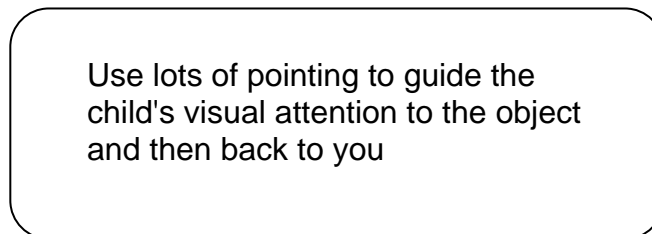
The following pages suggest some activities and games you can play with your child to help them develop better attention skills. Here are some suggestions to help you get the most out of them:

- Find a quiet place with the TV and radio turned off and no other noisy distractions, interesting toys or people to take your child's mind off what you want to do with them.
- Sit opposite your child so they can see you clearly.
- Make sure they are looking at you before you begin the activity.
- Remember the level of play your child is at and modify the activities accordingly so that they can tolerate them.

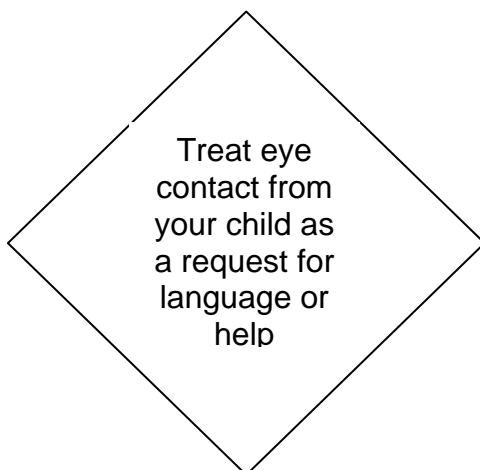
Useful strategies for deaf children



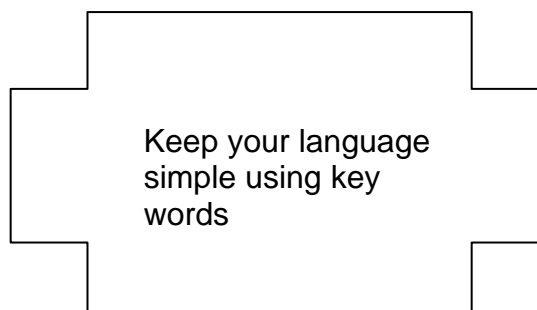
Play games that involve looking at moving toys



Use lots of pointing to guide the child's visual attention to the object and then back to you



Treat eye contact from your child as a request for language or help



Keep your language simple using key words

Strategies for developing stage 1 attention

- Choose things that get your child's attention and then keep it for as long as possible. You can encourage this by helping your child to explore each object or toy in as many ways as possible. What does it do/feel like/smell like/sound like?

- Stop when your child loses interest and wait for a while before you bring out the next toy. It can help to keep toys hidden in a bag or box until you are ready to bring them out. This will increase your child's curiosity about what's coming next and stop them from being distracted by too many toys.
- Select interesting toys like pop-up toys, squeaky toys and rattles, bubbles (for blowing, catching, popping, feeling), finger/hand rhymes (for example, 'Round and Round the Garden', 'This Little Piggy Went to Market', 'Two Little Dicky Birds').

Strategies for developing stage 2 attention

- Continue to think about making the environment as free from distractions as possible.
- Comment on what your child is doing.
- This is an opportunity to play alongside your child with similar toys.

Strategies for developing stage 3 attention

This is an important stage to reach with deaf children. Because they receive limited sound, it is essential that they learn to develop their visual attention skills and are able to move their attention between toys or objects and you. This shared attention also provides you with the perfect opportunity to feed in language at the times when they are focused on you.

- Call their name first to get their attention.
- Use pointing/your hand where they can see you to draw their attention to you and then back to the object/toy.
- Because their attention will be short-lived, keep your language short and simple. Use one or two words only, which are related to the shared focus of interest. Naming or labelling is useful so you are feeding in the language related to the toys/objects they are focussing on. This will help them make the link between the word and the object.

Strategies for developing stage 4 attention

Continue to use ideas similar to stage 3.

Strategies for developing stage 5 attention

It is worth being aware that this stage can be difficult for deaf children to fully accomplish in all environments. It is reliant on their ability to listen and understand the message without looking,

and is therefore heavily reliant on their listening skills and communication mode. Therefore, the ideas from stage 3 above may continue to be the most appropriate for some deaf children. The professionals working with you will advise you how best to support your child. We hope that children who receive their cochlear implants before they are 2 years old will be able to develop this level of attention.

Need and desire to communicate

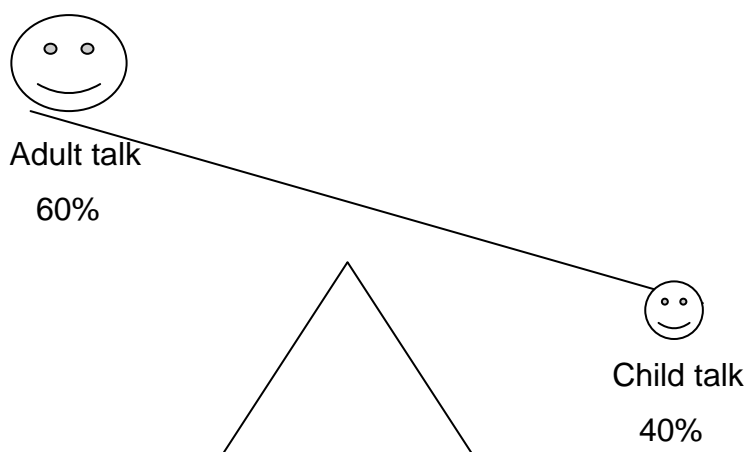
Children need:

- Time to communicate (a 'communication balance' between the talker and listener)
- Something to communicate about.

As parents we need to make sure our children are motivated to communicate and have opportunities to do so. The following are some ideas that create communication opportunities.

The communication balance

It is important to provide good language models for your child in your own speech, but your child also needs enough time to take their turn when communicating. It is all about balancing the role of talker and listener.



A good balance to aim for is 60% adult talk and 40% child talk

Things to remember to achieve the communication balance

- Wait for your child to look at you and let them initiate communication. You may need to wait longer than you think, but persevere and give your child time.
- Talk about what your child is doing or is interested in.
- Feed in language for your child, but remember not to overdo it! You both need to have turns. Try commenting on what is happening if your child is reluctant to take a turn. Don't ask lots of questions!
- Wait for your child to respond. Your waiting in anticipation will help your child to know that they are expected to take a turn.
- Reinforce and repeat your child's attempts to communicate. Early success and positive reactions from you will encourage your child to communicate again.

Something to communicate about

Use high interest toys that require adult help or make ordinary toys more interesting:

- Blow up balloons. Let them deflate and wait for the child to request they want it again.
- Blow and burst soap bubbles. Wait for your child to request this again. You can input key words such as 'pop'.
- Windup toys.
- Pop up toys.
- Hide toys in containers with screw-on lids that your child can't open on their own so need to ask for help.

Social routines and simple games are also a natural way of encouraging communication:

- Look excited/surprised looking out of the window.
- Peek-a-boo.
- 'Pat a cake' and other finger games.
- Tickling.
- Chasing.
- Hide and seek.
- Funny faces in a mirror.

Avoid anticipating all your child's needs and wait for them to communicate with you when:

- Shoe laces/buttons need doing up

- Refilling their drink
- A door needs to be opened
- Something needs to be opened (for example a crisp packet).

Once your child has developed these early foundation skills, they are ready to build on this and develop early language skills. Our leaflet, Supporting early language and speech development, will help you with this.

Appointments at King's

We have teamed up with King's College Hospital in a partnership known as King's Health Partners Academic Health Sciences Centre. We are working together to give our patients the best possible care, so you might find we invite you for appointments at King's. To make sure everyone you meet always has the most up-to-date information about your health, we may share information about you between the hospitals.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about early listening development, please contact the Paediatric Auditory Implant Programme on **020 7188 6245**.

Pharmacy medicines helpline

For information about any medicines that you have been prescribed at Guy's and St Thomas' hospitals, you can speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

To make comments or raise concerns about the Trust's services, please contact PALS. Ask a member of staff to direct you to the PALS office or:

t: 020 7188 8801 at St Thomas' **t:** 020 7188 8803 at Guy's **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

Knowledge & Information Centre (KIC)

For more information about health conditions, support groups and local services, or to search the internet and send emails, please visit the KIC on the Ground Floor, North Wing, St Thomas' Hospital.

t: 020 7188 3416

Language support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch using the following contact details.

t: 020 7188 8815 **fax:** 020 7188 5953

NHS Direct

Offers health information and advice from specially trained nurses over the phone 24 hours a day.

t: 0845 4647 **w:** www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

w: www.nhs.uk

Become a member of your local hospitals, and help shape our future

Membership is free and it is completely up to you how much you get involved. To become a member of our Foundation Trust, you need to be 18 years of age or over, live in Lambeth, Southwark, Lewisham, Wandsworth or Westminster or have been a patient at either hospital in the last five years. To join:

t: 0848 143 4017 **e:** members@gstt.nhs.uk **w:** www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk

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