



Communication and Your 1- to 2-year-old

Language development really takes off during this time, especially as your baby approaches his or her second birthday. Your child is better able to comprehend what you say and express what he or she wants. He or she will take joy in his ability to understand more complex directions - and won't hesitate to give you directions.

How Does My Baby Communicate?

Most babies say their first words toward the beginning of this period, though some start even sooner and others don't start talking until they are nearly 2 years old. If your baby is preoccupied with learning to walk, he or she may push talking to the back burner; this is not unusual and nothing to be alarmed about.

Your baby may have learned fragments of dozens of words that probably won't be recognizable yet. When he or she gets around to talking, though, your baby will probably progress quickly. He or she will soon be able to point at something familiar and say its name, and recognize names of familiar people, objects, and body parts. By 2 years, he or she may use phrases and even two- to four-word sentences, although your doctor will only expect to hear that your child is putting two words together.

No matter when your child says his or her first words, it's a sure bet he or she will be understanding much of what you say well before that. Your child should be able to respond to commands ("Roll the ball to Mommy") and should be fully aware of the names of familiar objects and family members.

You will undoubtedly find yourself struggling with your toddler to do as you say, only to have him or her ignore you or scream in protest. Your child is merely testing your limits and his or her degree of control. By 18 months, he or she will probably have mastered saying "no" with authority, and by age 2 he or she may throw a tantrum when he or she is unwilling to do something you ask. Your child will also show signs of possessiveness, and you'll frequently hear "mine" or see tears if something is taken away or you show attention toward someone else.

What Should I Do?

Your baby is listening to everything you say, and he or she is storing it away at an incredible rate. Instead of using "baby" words, teach your child the correct names for people, places, and things. Speak slowly and clearly, and keep it simple.

Your baby may still be communicating with gestures such as pointing to something he or she wants. Gestures are OK, but you should use a running commentary such as, "Do you want a drink?" (when he or she points to the refrigerator), then wait for a response. Then say, "What do you want? Apple juice? OK, let's get some apple juice." Such behavior encourages your baby to respond and participate in conversations. But don't frustrate your baby by withholding food or drink waiting for a response.

Between 15 and 18 months, your baby will probably begin to enjoy language games that ask him or her to identify things, such as: "Where's your ear?" and "Where is Mommy?" Your child's vocabulary

will grow quickly, but his pronunciation isn't likely to keep pace. Resist the temptation to correct your baby's pronunciation; most babies mispronounce their words. Instead, emphasize the correct pronunciation in your response.

Should I Be Concerned?

Some babies don't talk until their second birthday and choose instead to get by with the use of gestures and sounds. Vocabulary varies widely at this age, too; some babies say dozens of words, others only a few.

Most babies this age have these communication milestones in common:

- Speak about 15 words by 18 months
- Put two words together to form a sentence by age 2
- Follow simple directions by age 2

Hearing problems may become more apparent during this stage because of the emergence of speech. Don't hesitate to report any concerns you have to your doctor immediately, especially if you feel your child is not babbling or responding to your speech patterns. Sometimes chronic ear infections can leave children with excessive fluid buildup that can interfere with normal hearing. Special tests can check for hearing loss.

Some parents worry that a toddler who is not speaking may have autism. Children with autism and related conditions may have delayed speech or other problems with communication, but poor social interactions, and limited or restricted interests or patterns of behavior are also hallmarks of this disorder. If you have any questions or concerns about your child's development, talk with your child's doctor.

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