

'The Best Start for Life: The first 1001 critical days



The City of London has developed a speech and language programme called COLTALE (City of London Talks & Listens Enthusiastically). We understand the importance of good speech, language and communication skills to give all children the best start in life.

COLTALE aims to support all children to develop those skills and to further develop close partnerships between parents and early years practitioners/teachers.

What is the relevance of the report 'The Best Start for Life: A Vision for the 1,001 Critical Day' to COLTALE?

Here are some excerpts from the report to summarise its purpose and findings.

1. The Review focused on the 1,001 critical days through pregnancy to the age of two.
2. The 1,001 days from pregnancy to the age of two set the foundations for an individual's cognitive, emotional, and physical development. Science tells us that a child's experiences from conception through their first five years will go on to shape their next 50. More than a million new neural connections are formed every second in the first year of a baby's life. Sensory pathways for basic functions like vision and hearing develop first, followed by early language skills and higher cognitive functions.
3. Although genes provide the basic blueprint, experiences influence how and when genes are expressed. Some of the most important experiences that will shape the architecture of a baby's brain come from their interactions with significant adults in their lives. Babies naturally reach out for interaction through babbling, facial expressions, and movements. The adults caring for them respond in kind with sounds and gestures. This back-and-forth process, known as 'serve and return', plays a vital role in developing the wiring of the brain. The brain has the greatest ability to reorganise and adapt in the early years of life. When the brain is most flexible, it can accommodate a range of experiences and interactions. For example, by its first year, the parts of the brain that differentiate sounds are becoming specialised to the language the baby is exposed to. The emotional health and physical wellbeing, social skills, cognitive and linguistic capacities that develop in the 1,001 critical days form the foundations for an individual's success in school and in later life.

How can we support Speech, Language and Communication development in those first 1001 days?

Did you know?

1. Babies can hear you, in pregnancy, from at least 16 weeks, and perhaps earlier.
2. Babies learn to recognise and remember their mother's voice during pregnancy – hearing and feeling the vibrations.
3. By 20th week of gestation a baby's ears are fully developed – and their hearing system a month later.
4. Between 26 and 30 weeks most babies start to respond to external noise.
5. Third trimester 'chats' with your unborn baby can help form foundations for your child's communication skills



What advice can you give to expectant parents to promote these skills?



bump

1. Relax - Taking time out as part of a daily routine to think about and bond with your unborn baby is known to release oxytocin, a hormone which can help your baby's brain to develop.
2. Respond to your baby - talk to your
 - play music to your baby (don't place headphones on your bump, it will be too loud!)
 - write a letter to your baby and read it out aloud
 - Babies hear their mother's voice most clearly, but other people in the family can talk and sing to them as well

Communicating with newborns

Babies begin to communicate from the moment they are born.

Babies start communicating through crying. Different cries mean different things and most parents soon learn their baby's language and can understand what they are asking for. But babies also can cry when they feel overwhelmed or for no clear reason at all. They might just need comforting or to be taken away from the noise or confusion.

Babies use other means of communication too. They can tell the difference between a human voice and other sounds and can often be

soothed by a familiar voice. Even when they are looking elsewhere they will pay close attention to a human voice. They may subtly adjust their body position, move their arms and legs, or change their facial expression.



Newborns soon become used to seeing their parent/primary carer and will begin to focus on their face. They will be curious about all noises, but will be particularly responsive to the spoken voice. Even though babies don't understand everything, they enjoy being spoken to, helping them feel reassured.

Babies cannot be spoiled with too much attention, Quick responses to babies' cries lets them feel secure and important.

Speech and Language Milestones

4-6 months - Babies start babbling. They might even say 'dada' or 'mama', but they do not relate these to anyone in particular, They are finding out what they can do with their tongue, vocal cords, teeth and palate. They may start to respond to their name too.



7-12 months - Baby's babblings should start to make some sense. They try to copy patterns and words that they hear around them frequently. Now is a good time to share more books together.



13-18 months -The child will start using more than one word and might start to join them too, showing that they know what they are saying. They might start changing tone for different things, for example when they ask a

question.

19-24 months - at this age children pick up new words almost every other day. They might make small sentences like "Want water", etc, which shows that they have a better understanding of what words mean. They will probably also start singing lines of songs.



How can we build on these milestones?

1. Respond

Understand a baby's body language and respond positively. For instance, if your baby picks up a toy, smile, look into their eyes and play together for a little while



2. Listen

Listening to a baby encourages them to talk more. Give them the impression that you understand their babbling by repeating back what they say.

3. Imitate

As they start saying real words, copy what your child says though in a more correct manner. For instance, if your toddler says 'cal' instead of cat, say the corrected word back to them.



4. Explain

If your baby shows an interest in something e.g., by pointing and babbling, explain what they see and elaborate on it. For instance, 'Are you looking at that bright light? It helps us see when it's dark'



5. Describe

Describe what you are doing so your child can make a connection between the action and the words. For instance, if they're helping you wash up, you can say, "Now let's put some washing up liquid on the sponge"

6. Open questions

Try not to always ask questions that just need a yes-no answer. Open questions will encourage children to think and find out the answer by themselves. For instance, when doing breakfast, rather than asking "Would you like milk? Would you like water?" ask "Do you want milk or water?" This will make them choose and communicate back to you.



7, Praise

Whenever your baby or toddler tries to talk or says a word even if it can't be understood, praise them, then they will be encouraged to talk more



8. Read

Show your baby pictures in books and describe them. Ask your baby or toddler if they can find different things to encourage them to name them and talk to you.



9. Play

Sing, play, do action and nursery rhymes. Encourage your child to use their imaginations. If they are playing 'shops' with you, what are they buying and what do they plan to make? Singing teaches rhythm and introduces new words. Action songs help your child's understanding and links words to actions.

10. Follow Your Baby's Pace

Make sure you follow your child's interests or let them lead; they will understand that communication is a two-way involvement of listening and talking.



If you feel that your baby's language isn't developing talk to your health visitor. There can be many reasons for speech delay in children although it's important to get it diagnosed as early as possible

With thanks and credit to:

- <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/cnewborn.html>
- [Language Development Milestones for Babies](#)
- milyhubsnetwork.com/the-best-start-for-life-a-vision-for-the-1001-critical-days