

**Introduction: 0 to 6 months**

When it comes to speech and language, the first five years of life are filled with excitement. The communication skills your child develops during this time will have a major impact on your child's experiences throughout his or her life... at school, in relationships, at work, and in day to day life. And as a parent, there's a great deal you can do to help support your child's language development.

But how do you know if your child's communication skills are developing on track? The first step is to know what your child should be able to do at each stage... each of these accomplishments is called a milestone.

Think of every milestone as being built on building blocks. After each milestone is reached... the foundation is laid for the next one. The more blocks you have, the more solid your structure.

This program will demonstrate some of the communication milestones your child should be reaching at about this age. It will also show you how to give your child the Building Blocks needed to help him or her reach those milestones.

**Milestones: 0 to 6 months**

Although your baby can't fully understand what you're saying, he or she is learning fast. Babies learn to talk by listening to the voices and sounds all around them, and they learn according to their own timetable.

With the help of Lexie and her mom, let's look at some of the milestones your baby should reach by 6 months of age...

- Reaches for objects of interest, like a toy.
- Turns toward a sound source or startles in reaction to sudden, loud noises.
- Responds to his or her name.
- Makes different cries for different needs, such as when hungry or tired.
- Smiles and laughs in response to your smile and laugh.
- Plays with different sounds, like squeals, growls, gurgles, raspberries or maybe even speech sounds like "dah" or "buh"
- Starts to imitate speech sounds such as "buh" and non-speech sounds, like tongue clicks or coughing.

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**HEAD OFFICE/  
SIÈGE SOCIAL**  
1000, rue Pitt St.  
Cornwall, ON K6J 5T1  
T. 613-933-1375  
1 800 267-7120  
F. 613-933-7930

**ALEXANDRIA**  
60, rue Anik St.  
Alexandria, ON K0C 1A0  
T. 613-525-1112  
1 844 225-1112  
F. 613-525-2603

**CASSELMAN**  
872, rue Principale St.  
P.O. Box/C.P. 338  
Casselman, ON K0A 1M0  
T. 613-764-2841  
1 800 267-8260  
F. 613-764-0264

**HAWKESBURY**  
134, rue Main St. E  
Suite/bureau 301  
Hawkesbury, ON K6A 1A3  
T. 613-632-4355  
1 800 565-2314  
F. 613-632-4171

**ROCKLAND**  
2229, rue Laurier St.  
Suite/bureau 200  
2nd floor/à l'étage  
Rockland, ON K4K 0B7  
T. 613-446-1400  
1 844 446-1400  
F. 613-446-1454

**WINCHESTER**  
530, rue Fred St.  
Suite/bureau A  
P.O. Box/C.P. 616  
Winchester, ON K0C 2K0  
T. 613-774-2739  
1 844 774-2739  
F. 613-774-4079

These are some of the milestones your baby should reach by about 6 months of age, but it's important to remember that every child is unique and will reach milestones at his or her own pace.

However, some babies have difficulty developing normal speech and language skills, and may need extra help from a specialist. It's important for these children to get help early to prevent more problems later on, and so that they can reach their fullest potential. Be sure to speak with your healthcare provider if your baby doesn't react to your voice or other sounds... doesn't smile or make sounds when awake... avoids eye contact... no longer babbles... or if you have any other concerns about your baby's development.

Now... let's look at some important ways that you as a parent can help your baby build her growing communication skills...

**Building blocks: 0 to 6 months**

As the parent of a new baby, you don't need special training to offer your little one a positive start in life. But what can be helpful are a few simple building blocks to encourage healthy development. From 0 to 6 months, it's important to give your baby the time and space to explore and to interact. Let's look at how Lexie and her mom demonstrate a few of these building blocks.

Believe it or not, simple games like peek-a-boo are more than just entertaining. In fact these types of games are important to your little one's development. For example, peek-a-boo is fun and repetitive. The more your baby hears you and watches you play... the more likely she'll be to request it again.

Your baby is never too young to be read to... although she may not understand all the words, she will enjoy your soothing and rhythmic voice. Sometimes "reading" is simply describing the images in a book without really sticking to the actual story...

The main idea is to introduce your baby to books at an early age. Let her explore the colours, the textures and the sounds. If all she does is chew on the book, that's ok too. You can even get into the habit of reading a book as part of a bedtime routine. This is something that can help your child relax before it's time to sleep... and will be something you both enjoy for years to come.

When you play with baby, bring her close to your face. By holding her close, you're teaching her the importance of eye contact in communication. Plus, she'll find your face and expressions fascinating and may even try to mimic them. Have fun with this! Try sticking out your tongue... and watch as she does the same.

Your baby loves to be imitated. Try to make the same sounds she makes. To encourage her speech... when you imitate her sound, add to that sound to make a simple word. In this next clip, watch as Lexie says "dah"... Mom then adds another "dah" to make the word "dada". It won't be long before Lexie says "dada"!

Show your baby a favourite object... then pull it away. Or, start a favourite activity, and then pause. Watch how Lexie's mom takes away the blanket but then pauses and wants to see Lexie's reaction.

Did you see what happened? Lexie reached for the blanket... which is her way of asking for more.

This simple game encourages your baby to ask for something she wants by using her voice, or by gazing at the object or reaching for it. It also helps to teach her the valuable skill of taking turns.

Every day, your baby sends you messages through sounds, facial expressions, and movements. When your baby sounds as if she's trying to ask you a question, make a demand, or make a statement... respond to her as though she's saying something important. By giving meaning to her sounds, cries and babbles, you're encouraging her to keep on communicating with her voice. In this clip, Lexie is crying and reaching for a toy flower. Her mom gives meaning to that message by asking her "Do you want the flower?"

By giving meaning to your baby's message, you're teaching her that through her sounds, gestures and cries, she can get a response... and that her messages are important enough to be listened to.

Your baby loves to hear your voice. Talk and sing to your baby as often as possible... when dressing, feeding, changing a diaper, or at bedtime.

Part of teaching your baby good communication skills is actually getting your baby's attention. The more you smile, laugh and be animated... the more your baby will pay attention to you.

## CONCLUSION

In this program, we've reviewed some of the milestones your child should reach at about this age, and some simple ways that you can support his or her growing communication skills.

You're encouraged to return to this resource at each step of your child's development. And remember: if at any stage you have concerns about your child's speech and language development, don't hesitate to talk to your healthcare provider. By using the simple tips we've discussed in this program, and by getting help for any communication problems early, you can help pave the way for your child's future success!