

Cleft Care: Early communication

Everyday routines are full of small moments where your baby can learn, connect, and communicate. Babies with a cleft palate may need a little extra support early on. With simple strategies, you can turn everyday moments into great opportunities for communication.

Here are 4 easy ways to support your baby's early communication during your normal day.

1. Get face to face

Babies learn a lot by watching your eyes, your smile and how your mouth moves.

Try:

- bringing your baby up to your eye level
- getting close during tummy time
- sitting on the floor together.



Being face to face helps your baby see how sounds are made and feel more connected to you. Encourage your baby to be noisy! Smile, listen, and show interest in their sounds.

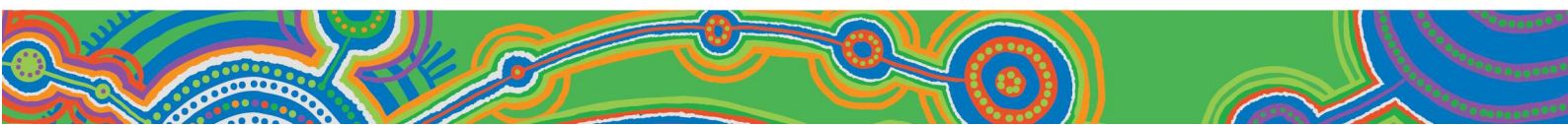
2. Let your child lead

Follow what catches your child's attention and join in. This helps your baby learn that communication is meaningful and fun.

If your baby is watching cars, you might say:

“Car! Brrmm!”

Let their interests guide what you talk about.



3. Model language

Talk about what you're doing or what your baby sees.

Try saying things like:

"Bath time! Look at the water, splash splash!"

"Up you go!"

"All finished. Let's dry your hands."

You don't need perfect sentences. Simple words, said often, help your baby learn.

4. Repeat and respond

Copy your baby's sounds and add to them. This shows your baby that their sounds matter and encourages more communication.



For example:

"Mm!"

"Yes — you want more! Yum, more pasta!"

Copy their sounds and then pause. This teaches them how to take turns in conversations.

Everyday tips

Here are some tips for activities to help build attention, confidence, and early sound skills.

Small, frequent moments really add up Simple play makes a big difference.

Everyday moments are great opportunities for communication. For example, during:

- nappy changes
- feeding time
- bath time
- play time
- getting in and out of the car or pram
- book reading.

- Books with repetition, like Spot, Dear Zoo, or That's Not My series
- Early sounds that are easier to copy, such as *b*, *p*, *d*, *t*
- Action songs like Twinkle Twinkle, Old MacDonald, or Open Shut Them
- Fun games like bubbles, mirror play, or raspberries.



After palate surgery

Once your child has healed from surgery (usually after three weeks), they may start trying new sounds. Focus on front-of-the-mouth sounds like *b, p, t, d* using simple words such as:

- Bye-bye
- Ta-da
- Pop
- Peek-a-boo.

Try not to copy back throat sounds (like growls or “uh-oh”). Instead, gently model front sound words, such as “oopsie.”

When to seek extra support

Contact your Speech Pathologist if your child:

- has only a few words by 18-24 months
- sounds mostly nasal or uses throat sounds
- seems frustrated when trying to communicate.



Most children with a repaired cleft palate catch up with their peers by school age, but early support helps build confident communicators.

Every sound and word are important! Talking, playing, and connecting with your child everyday makes a real difference.

Cleft Care team contacts

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the cleft team for support.

Clinical nurse specialist

Phone: (08) 6456 8132

Speech Pathology

Phone: (08) 6456 0414

Cleft administration

Phone: (08) 6456 4380

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