

# Communicating with your baby

## Information for parents and families

Although your baby needs medical and nursing care, you are a crucial part of their life. We hope to share some ideas that will help you to bond with your baby whilst also supporting their communication development. Even at this early stage, you can have a positive influence on your baby's speech, language and communication skills.

### Your loving voice

From as young as 25 weeks, your baby shows an interest in voices. At 28 weeks your baby can recognise the voices they hear the most especially their Mummy and Daddy's. Knowing that you are close triggers the release of the hormone oxytocin which helps soothe your baby and also supports bonding and brain development. When your baby hears your voice, it activates the auditory centre in their brain and this an essential first step in their speech and language development. Being close to you and hearing your voice is an important part of their care and development.

### Getting to know each other

From birth, your baby uses both internal and external signals to communicate with you. These subtle signs or cues are your baby's way of telling you when they are feeling calm and content or perhaps unsettled and uncomfortable. Read the "Understanding baby behaviour" leaflet too for more information on understanding your baby's cues.

### You can help your baby's communication development by trying the following things when you are together:

- Talk to your baby. It may come easily, or you may feel a bit awkward at first.
- Tune into your baby's cues. If you notice they look a little overwhelmed whilst you are talking, stay quiet for a moment.
- Your baby will spend a lot of time asleep, but you can still talk to them and let them know you are there. Remember to watch their cues for signs they may be overwhelmed.
- Speak quietly using your "library voice" (45 decibels) whilst you are talking. The team will use quiet voices too.
- Comment on what you are doing while you are doing things e.g. "It's time for me to change your nappy now" or "Let's have a cuddle whilst you have your tube feed".
- Read to your baby. You could choose a baby book, the novel you are reading, a religious text or the newspaper – whatever you are comfortable with.

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- Sing lullabies, nursery rhymes or your favourite songs. Remember whatever you choose to sing, they will love listening to it because it is you. They recognise your voice and find it comforting.
  - Use a varied sing song tone, this can make your baby more interested in your voice and help them to listen. A gentle voice with changes in intonation, sometimes called “baby talk”, can help your baby tune in, but the most important thing is just hearing your familiar voice.
  - Use whatever language you feel most comfortable with. It may be a time to think about the traditional songs that you remember from when you were little.

## Things that may change how we communicate during Coronavirus pandemic

Whilst you and your baby are in hospital you may have to wear a surgical mask as a form of protection from Coronavirus. We are aware that the mask as well as providing protection also hides your mouth and smile. If your baby is on the neonatal unit they may benefit from the following strategies during this period:

- Try to get close to your baby, so they can see your face (in the incubator or in your arms). Use eye contact if possible.
- Smile at your baby. Even though your mouth may be covered we smile with our eyes also.
- Use touch and a gentle voice to reassure your baby.
- Ask the nurse if there is a possibility of having time with your baby without wearing a mask E.g. If physical distancing can be maintained with others in the room.

### How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (**PALS**) on **020 3313 0088** (Charing Cross, Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte’s & Chelsea hospitals), or **020 3312 7777** (St Mary’s and Western Eye hospitals). You can also email PALS at [imperial.pals@nhs.net](mailto:imperial.pals@nhs.net) The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department:

Complaints department  
Fourth floor  
Salton House  
St Mary’s Hospital  
Praed Street  
London W2 1NY

Email: [ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net](mailto:ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net)

Telephone: **020 3312 1337 / 1349**

### Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team: [imperial.patient.information@nhs.net](mailto:imperial.patient.information@nhs.net)

### Wi-fi

We have a free wi-fi service for basic filtered browsing and a premium wi-fi service (requiring payment) at each of our five hospitals. Look for NHS Wi-Fi, WiFiSPARK\_FREE or WiFiSPARK\_PREMIUM