



# TAKING TURNS

**A Guide on Interaction and the  
Early Stages of Development**





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## Foreword

Interaction is important for us all. The child and the parents have equally significant roles in the progress of interaction. Interaction skills grow stronger through shared experiences.

This guide centers on the development of a child's interaction and language skills up until the age of approximately two and a half years. Every child develops at her or his own individual pace. In many cases children learn to communicate in a manner that hardly calls for any special attention. Communication skills do not however always develop in an average timeframe. A child's way of acting in situations of interaction may also seem different compared to other children.

If a child is raised in a multilingual environment, his development may be a little delayed in the early stages, but normally the child catches up soon. Usually children can even learn several lan-



At the end of each chapter we offer some pointers on how adults can support a child's development. We recommend that you choose from the list the kind of measures that suit your own situation the best. Everything doesn't have to be done all at once. What matters the most is the joy of interaction and being together.

guages without difficulty if they are used in their daily environment. If a child has problems with his language development, they usually appear in every language concerned.

This guide is meant for adults who wish to gain further information on the child's early stages of development in interaction, communication and language skills. The guide describes how a child can be supported if his language development is not, for some reason or another, progressing in an average manner. If something in the development of your child's interaction, communication and language skills concerns you, be reminded that you are not alone. The child health center (*neuvola*) is a good place to discuss any questions concerning your child's development.





photo: Barbro Wickström

photo: Timo Hartikainen

## Spending time together strengthens interaction

All people have the need to communicate with others. Experiences of interaction start to build up right after a child is born. A newborn baby is placed on the mother's stomach where he can feel the warmth of her skin and hear the heart-beat he has already got accustomed to in the womb. The mother responds to the baby's movements by touching him, seeking eye contact and speaking to him.

From his earliest moments on the baby starts to form a conception in his mind of being together and interaction. The baby communicates about his needs and the adult responds to them. For the baby interaction is like the cradle of development, since all the areas of development are constructed in situations of interaction. When adults interpret the baby's needs and respond to





**The baby communicates about his needs and the adult responds. For the baby, interaction is like the cradle of development, since all the areas of development are constructed in situations of interaction.**

***The baby usually is in this stage of development for the few months following birth.***

them, they also support the development of the baby's basic sense of security, emotion regulation and attention skills.

During the first months a baby communicates needs relating to his vital functions, which the adults respond to. It is important that the baby has a sense that his sleep and eating cycle are falling in place, he is soothed when his stomach aches etc. Once these basic needs are fulfilled, the baby gains experiences that his communications are understood and communicating is worthwhile.

Early experiences of interaction are of key importance to all areas of development. Early interaction also practices the basic capacities that are needed later in more diverse communication with others. The basic elements of interaction, i.e. contact, presence and turn-taking, are needed in all situations of communication throughout a person's life.

The baby is a personality from the very beginning of his life. To other people he is a new acquaintance that takes time to get to know. Some parents say that they don't really give much thought to how they act with the baby – things sort of proceed on their own. But sometimes it can take longer to find a common tone with the baby.

Successful moments of interaction strengthen communication, produce mutual satisfaction and encourage to continue on.

### **ADULTS CAN SUPPORT THE BABY'S DEVELOPMENT BY:**

- being peacefully present when spending time together with the baby and caring for him
- focusing on the baby
- observing the baby's initiatives (crying, satisfied sounds, movements)
- responding to the baby (talking, holding, stroking, seeking eye contact, nurturing)
- soothing a restless baby
- encouraging a baby who likes to keep to himself to interact

**If you are concerned about something in your baby's development or interaction, you can discuss it during your visit to the child health center (*neuvola*).**



**! The baby needs regular and abundant experiences that his actions and sounds can influence the course of events.**

photo: Annakaisa Ojanen

photo: Kirsi-Marja Savola



## From unintentional expression to intentional communication

During his first months the baby develops the ability to calm down and trust that his basic needs are met. After that begins the active stage of developing interaction skills, emotional skills and skills that support communication. For example, the messages a baby communicates with his gestures, expressions and demeanor no longer relate solely to the baby's needs, and the baby starts to describe through his own means of expression how he experiences the outside world.

Daily life with the baby is made up of

shared activities: changing diapers, getting dressed and undressed, eating, preparing for bed or just simply being together. Regular routines help the baby to conceptualize the events of a day and predict what will happen next. When the baby's communications are responded to, he feels safe and gains experiences of his own ability to influence events. When the baby feels lonely or hungry, he might start to whine. The mother or father hears it and interprets it to mean that the baby wants to be held or that he is hungry. The parent talks to the ba-

by and goes to him, picks him up and strokes him. If the baby calms down, the parent's interpretation that the baby wanted to be held was most likely correct. If the baby continues to whine, the parent offers him milk. If the baby calms down when he gets milk, the parent's interpretation that the baby was hun-

***The baby is in this stage of development at the average age of 3-12 months.***

! It is important to language development that the parents speak their own native language to their child.

gry was correct. When parents consistently interpret the baby's whining it becomes a *symbol* of asking to be held or for food.

Already at the age of a few months the baby starts to use sounds in interaction in a more versatile manner. Crying, burping when eating, smacking sounds and hiccups are joined by sounds of pleasure, laughter and cooing. Producing sounds becomes more intentional. The baby expresses himself in situations of interaction and play diversely by making sounds, shrieking and burbling. The sounds are supported by body movements and wriggling of limbs. Gradually the producing of sounds shifts from experimentation with the extremities of sounds to blabbering. When the baby babbles, he produces rhythmic, polysyllabic series of sounds. Although they are meaningless, little by little they start to increasingly resemble the speech the baby hears in his environment.

The baby needs regular and

abundant experiences that his actions and sounds can influence the course of events. When the parents consistently interpret an action in a certain way, the given action starts to attain a mutually shared meaning. The action becomes an intentional symbol for something. At shared moments more and more of these *symbols* begin to emerge:

- the baby *shrieks* and *wiggles his limbs* in the bath when he wants to keep on bathing
- when eating the baby *turns his head* and *burbles* when he has had enough
- the baby *stretches out his arms* when he wants to be held
- if the parents are in the habit of playing peek-a-boo with the baby when changing the diaper, the baby *yelps* when he anticipates the beginning of a game
- if the peek-a-boo game usually culminates in, for example, tickling the baby, he starts to anticipate the tickle by *tensing his body* and *looking* at his caregiver expectantly

## ADULTS CAN SUPPORT THE BABY'S DEVELOPMENT BY:

- creating a clear daily routine that helps the baby to predict accustomed events
- providing surprising, playful experiences in everyday situations
- checking from the baby's reaction that the baby has enjoyed the surprising situation
- repeating the enjoyable, shared situation that the baby has got accustomed to
- making room for the baby's expressions
- paying special attention to the expressions and symbols the baby has started to use systematically to signify a certain thing
- acting according to their own interpretations and at the same time observing the baby's reactions to see if the interpretation is correct
- encouraging the baby to take turns and to play with sounds and blabbering
- singing, rhyming and playing games in which the baby can take turns
- talking to the baby in ordinary, daily situations
- naming emotions, things and actions connected to certain things
- letting go and relaxing together with the baby, joking around and chattering, so that the baby can tune into a shared state of emotion with the adult

**If you are concerned about something in your baby's development or interaction, you should discuss it during your visit to the child health center (*neuvola*).**





## Growing means of expression

Gradually the child and his caregivers start to communicate in a more versatile manner. The child uses his **body language, i.e. facial expressions, gestures, actions and stressing of sounds**, to express himself. The caregivers use alongside their regular speech similar means of body language as the child.

The child's babbling gains subtlety and the child starts to pick out parts or syllables of words. The child may point at a

lamp and say "amp" or put a cap on his head and say "ap". The supply of spoken words grows relatively slowly in the beginning. After learning around fifty words, many children experience a vocabulary spurt in which the rate of word acquisition suddenly begins to accelerate. At the same time children start to combine words into longer sequences. In the child's communication actions, gestures, facial expressions, babbling and attempts at words appear side by side

for a long time. At this stage of development the child understands speech much better than he is able to produce it.

***The child is in this stage of development at the average age of 1-2 years.***



! It is important that the child gets to express himself with the means that have already proven effective.



Although speech becomes the primary means of communication for most people, we all use the body language familiar from childhood in all interaction throughout our whole lives. Our verbal communications are supplemented by e.g. facial expressions, gestures and body movements.

### Delay of speech

The child's means of communication often develop so fast that no special attention is paid to them. The language development can however be slower in some

cases and the parents may feel like the child's attempts at words or speech are delayed. The pace of learning to speak, as with any other learning, is individual. One child may have a large vocabulary of spoken words right after his first birthday, another may proceed more slowly and won't start to produce words until he is nearing his second birthday.

Delay in verbal expression can be connected not only to the individual development pace but also to a delay in speech development or in the development of speech comprehension, or to

a more extensive problem in development. Growing up in a multilingual environment does not as such cause language disorders or delays in development. Whether it is a question of slow development or delayed development, it is important that the child gets to express himself with the means that have already proven effective. Adults should pay attention to what the child is trying to say through his own means of communication about his needs and wishes, or the things he likes or doesn't like.

When the parents understand their child's important communications and try to respond to them, the child stays motivated to express himself. When the child gains experiences that the people around him understand his gestures, facial expressions and sounds, he is motivated to express himself in a growing range of situations. The parents, in turn, continue to speak to the child normally and accompany their speech with body language. In doing so, they model for the child how both speech and body language can be used to express oneself. When the child hears the speech and its tones and at the same time sees the facial expressions and gestures connected to the speech, it is also easier for him to understand his parents' communications.

**! Using the alternative means of communication in everyday situations of interaction can speed up the development of a child's speech comprehension and expression skills. Using pictures or signs does not delay speech development.**

*photos: Kirsi-Marja Savola*



## **From gestures to signs, from pointing to pictures**

If the child goes through a long body language stage, facial expressions, gestures and action can be used to intensify communication. It is good to choose signs as commonly agreed gestures, which are practiced together with the child in the same manner as other gestures (such as waving) or words. The selected signs should be for words that are relevant in the child's daily life. They provide the child with a means to express himself about things that matter to him. Signs can be found on the Internet on, for example, the Papunet website ([www.papunet.net/kuvatyokalu](http://www.papunet.net/kuvatyokalu)). It is also good to ask for support in the use of signs from a speech therapist.

Using signs does not slow down the child's speech development but supports it and offers a new means for becoming understood before the child is able to use words. This also helps to keep the child from becoming frustrated in lack of means to express himself.

Some children are more easily interested in pictures than in gestures or signs. They may already have expressed themselves by pointing at things in their surroundings or inspecting illustrations in picture books or pictures in photo albums. Adults can show an example by pointing at pictures to accompany their speech, helping the child to express himself with the aid of pictures. Ready pic-

tures can, for example, be printed out from the Internet, cut out of magazines or drawn. The pictures can be collected in a folder that is used in situations of interaction. You can turn to a speech therapist for more information and support on the use of pictures to intensify communication.

Using these alternative means of communication in everyday situations of interaction can speed up the development of a child's speech comprehension and expression skills. It also ensures the existence of a means of communication that is as effective as possible, in case the child stays longer in this development stage for some reason or another.

## ADULTS CAN SUPPORT THE CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT BY:

- always speaking their own native language to the child
- observing the child and noticing his gestures, facial expressions, sounds, attempts at words and spoken words
- interpreting the child's expressions and responding to them
- checking from the child's reactions whether their interpretations are correct
- mimicking the child's expressions
- supplementing the child's expressions with their speech (e.g. "amp" ► "yes, there's the lamp" or when the child points at his toes when being dressed ► "yes, we'll put the sock on")
- making sure that the child understands the act of supplementing his expressions as an enriching, not a corrective, situation
- giving the child small tasks that support the development of speech comprehension and vocabulary (e.g. after taking his outdoor clothes off: "Give me the hat" "Show me the shoe" "Put the sock on")
- speaking to the child in short, clear sentences and varied nuances of tone
- playing little, plotted games with the child (adult or child pretend to feed each other with a spoon, they can also pretend to feed a doll)
- making sure that the time spent together is playful and proceeds at the child's own pace, so that the joy of interaction remains when new skills are learned
- enjoying the shared time, having fun with the child

**If you are concerned about something in the child's development and interaction, you should discuss it during your visit to the child health center (*neuvola*).**

## IF THE CHILD'S SPEECH DEVELOPMENT IS DELAYED IT CAN BE SUPPORTED BY:

- using the child's characteristic means of interaction to accompany your speech
- encouraging the child to play games of interaction using sounds
- mimicking the child's sounds and attempts at words
- using pictures, gestures and signs to accompany speech
- supporting the child in the use of gestures, signs and pictures
- gradually increasing the number of signs or pictures
- using signs and pictures alongside sounds, attempts at words and spoken words
- saying aloud the expressions the child produces through gestures, signs, pictures or attempts at words

**Discuss your questions concerning speech development during your visit to the child health center (*neuvola*) and ask for a referral to a speech therapist. The aim of speech therapy is to prevent, examine and rehabilitate speech and language disorders and related problems with interaction.**



- ! It is important that the parents model for the child, alongside using speech, how alternative means of communication are used for expression.

photos: Barbro Wickström



## Combining words into sentences

Playing is a way for the child to learn new things. The child enjoys it when his parents play, for example, turn-taking or plotted games with him. The games support the development of the child's language and thinking skills. The adults can introduce new elements to the games, but it is also good to notice even the most subtle initiatives the child takes in the game.

The child understands speech much better than he is able to produce it. The vocabulary of the produced words grows rapidly, although it still varies strongly between individuals. Some children may still be only starting to produce words, while others may actively use many hundred words. On the average a 2-year-old child produces around

200 words and the vocabulary keeps expanding fast. The produced words are still pronounced unclearly. For example, when a child says "hat" he may mean "that" or "cat". The child combines words into sentences that are still short and telegraphic and only says the most important words. The child may, for example, say: "Want mommy" or "Out swing" when he wants to go out and play in the swing.

If the child's speech expression skills

are slow to develop, he may start to produce sentences with gestures or by combining gestures and early word vocalizations. The child can, for example, comment "choo-choo" on a passing train while at the same time performing a rotating gesture with his hands to signify the wheels of the train. Or he can point his finger at the cupboard, smack his mouth and say "give" to ask for a treat. At the same time, the child indicates that he understands the idea of forming sentences. It is important for the child to gain experiences that his communications are valuable, communication is worthwhile and that he is understood.

If it's difficult for a child to understand speech or to express himself with the means at his disposal, his language de-

**The child is in this stage of development at the average age of 2-2 ½ years**

photo: Kirsi-Marja Savola



velopment can be further supported by using signs or picture communication symbols alongside intensive body language. The child can become a skillful communicator even if he cannot produce speech. The child can, for example, express things by combining pictures and signs.

In order for the child's communication skills to develop, it is important that the parents model for him, alongside using speech, how alternative means of communication are used for expression.

When the parents accompany their speech with signs or pictures it is easier for the child to understand their communications. It is also important that the parents tell the other people who spend time with the child how they can communicate with him in the best possible manner.

## ADULTS CAN SUPPORT THE CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT BY:

- playing turn-taking games and plotted pretend games with the child
- looking at picture books together with the child and talking with him about the pictures in them
- speaking clear, rich (native) language with the child
- noticing the child's expressions and responding to them
- encouraging the child to express himself: it isn't important how he says it but what he is saying
- interpreting the child's expressions in a linguistically richer form, as in "Go out swing" ► "Yes, soon we'll go out and play in the big swing"
- joking around, taking turns, enjoying the successes of communication

## IF THE CHILD'S SPEECH DEVELOPMENT IS DELAYED IT CAN BE SUPPORTED BY:

- noticing the expressions the child produces using signs or pictures
- modeling the use of body language and alternative means of communication by using them alongside their own speech
- saying the child's expressions aloud; for example, when a child signs CAT-HIDE, the adult responds: "Is the cat hiding? Oh-oh."
- checking that the message was understood correctly
- responding to the child's communications
- telling the other people who spend time with the child of the ways that help to communicate with him

**Ask the child health center (neuvola) for a referral to a speech therapist if you don't have a speech therapy contact yet.**



## *Interaction is supported when a parent...*

photos: Kirsi-Marja Savola



*... has unhurried time for the child.*



*... makes room for the child's initiatives to interact.*



*... notices the child's initiatives and responds to them.*

## **A child develops at his own individual pace**

The child develops and learns at his own individual pace. It is a continuum where the development stages follow one another in a way that is specific to the child. The language development of bilingual or multilingual children follows pretty much the same course as that

of monolingual children. The child learns new things in interaction with the people around him. The parents strengthen the child's development by offering him a balanced combination of support and challenges in development.

Parents often unconsciously know

what kind of interaction their child benefits from. If the child's development is not proceeding at an average pace, the parents may wish to seek assurance that they are doing the right things at the right time. You can ask for help and advice from speech development profes-

**!** Basing activities on things that motivate the child strengthens development.



*...uses a form of expression that the child understands.*



*... checks whether she and the child have understood each other.*

sionals (e.g. speech therapist or psychologist) at your child health center (neurologist).

If the child is interested in an activity central to a certain development stage longer than average, it makes sense to do things with him that are consis-

tent with that stage. Basing activities on things that motivate the child strengthens development. The child may, for example, want to repeat to a certain interaction game over and over again if he hasn't finished processing the skill connected with the game. The child may al-

so want to return to things that have been practiced before even when he has moved on to learning another new skill. When the parents carefully observe their child in situations of interaction and his interests, they can find activities that match the development of their child specifically.

The guide can be printed out at [www.papunet.net/english](http://www.papunet.net/english)

## More information

**Games, exercises and stories for rehabilitation,  
teaching and recreation in English**

[www.papunet.net/english/](http://www.papunet.net/english/)

**Games, sign and picture material in Finnish**

[www.papunet.net/kuva](http://www.papunet.net/kuva)  
[www.papunet.net/kuvatyokalu](http://www.papunet.net/kuvatyokalu)  
[www.papunet.net/materiaalit](http://www.papunet.net/materiaalit)  
[www.papunet.net/pelit](http://www.papunet.net/pelit)

**Useful information to immigrants**

[www.infopankki.fi](http://www.infopankki.fi)

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