

Build baby's vocabulary

Talking to your little one is the foundation of good communication

➤ SCHOOL OF THOUGHT

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AS PARENTS we hear so much about literacy and numeracy. It is a big concern for governments, for schooling and schools. But before children can read and write they learn about sounds, language and words from us.

So, our parenting role in the very early years is extremely important. There is much value in talking to our children, reading to them, singing to them, and narrating experiences and everyday happenings.

If the building blocks for literacy are the ability to speak, listen and respond then encouraging our children to express themselves matters a lot.

Too often parents reach for a dummy so children stay quiet without even thinking about how it might silence their child, stop their child from uttering sounds, from communicating with them, from developing language skills.

How wonderful when as early as seven weeks of age a baby discovers his or her voice. Coos and simple sounds are sources of delight for baby and parent. If you listen and respond to your baby's sounds they will babble and experiment even more. Leave the dummy alone. Value your baby's voice.

My children found other ways to soothe themselves – a belly button for one, a blanket for another. And they were free to babble and experiment with sounds.



WONDERFUL WORDS: Encouraging children to express themselves is important for building communication skills.

PHOTO: CAREY HOPE

By two years old their language is incredible. Without a dummy a child can copy the sounds they hear adults make and they can play with and try out sounds. This is important for developing the skills of speech.

Listening to you speak and watching you talk also helps your baby understand what communication entails. Even though they may not yet be talking they are listening and absorbing a huge amount of information about words and their meanings.

The more you talk to your baby, the more your baby will respond.

➤ TOP TIPS

- ✓ Talk to your child as much as possible
- ✓ Give your baby a running commentary on everything that is happening around him
- ✓ Sing songs and rhymes throughout each day
- ✓ Read lots of books and tell your child stories
- ✓ Forget about a dummy and let your child express herself
- ✓ Listen to your baby's efforts at babbling and cooing and respond
- ✓ Name the toys and objects and experiences happening around you and your baby

The best way to build children's vocabulary during the first three years is to talk to them – a lot. How much you talk counts.

The more conversations you have with your children the stronger the foundations for good communication.