

IS A QUIET BABY REALLY A GOOD BABY?

From birth babies begin to communicate. Initially the only form of communication a newborn uses is crying. However, babies will use different cries for different needs and feelings. Early vocalisations during infancy are necessary for speech development and reflect a maturing speech system. From around two months of age a baby will begin to make sounds or babble. This is the beginning where babies practise sounds, sound patterns and conversational routines readying themselves for their first words.

Research has proven that before a child says their first word they systematically develop their speech system enabling speech pathologists to identify if a child's speech system is developing appropriately.

At around two months of age to approximately four months of age, babies will:

- begin to produce vowel-like babbling sounds (e.g. /o/, /a/, /e/ and /i/)
- begin to use 'coo' and 'goo'
- produce pleasure sounds such as 'mmmmm'

Between the ages of four and six months:

- laughter emerges
- imitation of sounds in back and forth games with others develops
- extreme pitch changes (e.g. yells, squeals and low pitch growls) are heard
- sounds made at the front of the mouth are beginning to predominate such as blowing raspberries and lip smacks

Between six and ten months of age, 'canonical' babbling will appear. (Canonical is the term given to describe this important stage which is characterised by):

- repetitive, or reduplicated babbling (e.g. 'mama' and 'dada')
- early consonant-vowels (e.g. 'ba', 'di') sequences
- short exclamations such as 'ooh'
- variation in intonation patterns (e.g. his babble sounds like he is asking a question)

Between the ages of ten and twelve months:

- successive non-identical syllables appear (e.g. 'bada')
- variety of consonant-vowel ('di') and consonant – vowel – consonant ('bub') syllables with sentence-like intonation are heard
- approximations of meaningful single words begin
- syllables other than consonant – vowels are produced (e.g. 'aba')



By ten months of age, 'canonical' babbling should have begun not only in full-term, normally developing infants, but for those infants who are premature and from differing home language backgrounds.

Infants who don't develop this canonical babbling by 10 months of age show delays in their ability to speak but not in understanding words. A delay in using words puts these children at risk for developing speech and language difficulties.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- From birth, talk to your baby.
- Babies will begin to respond to being smiled at and talked to by smiling back and showing signs of pleasure.
- At around three months of age, you can practice cooing and gurgling together taking turns listening and making sounds. This is important for practising turn-taking of conversation that they will need later on.
- Copy his sounds
- Be animated when talking to your child
- Take turns babbling and saying sounds
- Babies who are talked to a lot are much more likely to be talkative children.
- Use short sentences and pause frequently
- Go hunting for sources of noise:
 - 'What's that?' (*dog*)
 - 'Here he is' (*dog*)
 - 'Pat dog'
- Read books – it doesn't matter how old
- Repeat words
- At eight months of age, babies become more interested in adult conversation and will listen and practice; therefore include him in conversation and answer the babble when it sounds like he's asking a question.
- Encourage first words with praise and imitate their words
- Name objects and actions during play and daily activities
- Line up toys and knock them into a box – say 'gone'
- Play with bubbles (e.g. 'bubbles', 'pop', 'all gone', 'more')
- Play with blocks (e.g. 'up', 'more', 'fall down', 'my turn')
- Have a 'tea party' (e.g. 'drink', 'more drink', 'bikkie', 'eat bikkie').

If you think your baby is a quiet baby, have a chat to a speech pathologist! They are never too young to benefit from speech pathology intervention, whether its play, structured therapy or strategies and techniques.