

# Language Development in the NICU

Language development begins in all babies before birth. These language connections can be interrupted when a baby is born early, and their language can take longer to develop.

## Understand why, when, and how to communicate with your baby.



photo: Unsplash

### Why? Your baby learns about language and communication by listening and watching you.

Talking often to your baby supports this early learning. Here are some important things to know:

### When? Learn the signs that your baby is ready to learn, or needs a rest:

#### Your baby is ready when:



Making eye contact



Looking alert, calm



Bringing hands towards mouth



Regular breathing, good colour

#### Your baby needs a rest when:



Turning head away



Breathing/oxygen level changes



Crying, yawning, gagging, tongue out



Limp, tired, or looking stressed



Opening eyes very wide, staring



Arching back, squirming

#### Did you know?

- ✓ All babies learn to recognize your voice before they are born!
- ✓ By communicating with your baby you will support your baby's premature brain to be able to recognize other familiar voices, stories, and different languages.

### At about 33 weeks gestation, your baby can communicate longer without getting overtired.

You can increase the amount of time you talk, read, or sing to your baby, while watching carefully for signs that your baby may need a rest.



### How? You can communicate with your baby by talking, reading books, or singing songs. Your baby loves your voice!

#### Talk or sing anywhere.

While your baby is in their NICU bed, while doing diaper changes, baths, feeds, or while holding your baby.

#### Go softly.

Speak or sing softly, in whatever language you feel most comfortable.

#### Repeat often.

Your baby will learn from hearing the same story or the same song often.

#### Use their name.

Your baby will learn to respond to their name if you use it often.

*If you are able to hold your baby, there is a special way to hold skin-to-skin, called Kangaroo Care. Ask your baby's nurse.*



Visit us online for more information on **Language Development**, plus other useful resources and programs focused on premature babies and their families.

CPBF  Canadian Premature Babies Foundation  
[canadianpremies.org](http://canadianpremies.org)



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