

Other local initiatives

- [Baby Talk](#)
- [Baby Express](#) - newsletter for parents
- [Nursery Talk – Worcestershire](#)

East Staffordshire Children's Centre in Burton-upon-Trent have been running **Baby Talk** courses in both English and Urdu for parents and their babies from the East Staffordshire area for the past three years.

The sessions encourage an awareness of early speech and communication skills between parents and children as well as promoting children's speech and language development. Each session finishes with songs and rhymes.

While developing the Baby Talk course, East Staffordshire Children's Centre found it difficult to find CD's of simple songs and rhymes in Urdu and as a result decided to create their own.

They recently produced a unique booklet and CD containing traditional English and Urdu songs and rhymes. The songs were recorded with local school children. Working together with community learning partnerships, they have secured funding to produce 2,500 copies of the booklet and CD and distributed them to parents, schools and other pre-school groups in the area.

Baby Express is a monthly newsletter distributed to parents over the first year of their child's life. It is produced by The Children's Foundation and was originally launched as part of a study into the impacts of parenting newsletters. It is age-paced with each issue covering a short, specific age in the life of a child. Each issue is packed with information and guidance in an easy to read format and includes a focus on emotional development, language, and how babies think. In addition, *Toddler Express* is produced bi-monthly to the age of three, and *Kids Express* bi-monthly until the age of five.

Baby Express was the subject of a randomised controlled trial in the North East of England looking at parental wellbeing and stress resulting from the infant and parenting quality over the first three years of life. At the end of the first year, interviews in the home revealed that mothers receiving the newsletter scored significantly less than control subjects on a parental hassle score, which indicated the frequency and severity of hassles caused by the baby. They were also rated better on two categories of a parenting quality questionnaire, specifically on showing inappropriate expectations of the infant and oppressing children's independence.

The newsletter is available in a generic format, so that it can be used by all areas and agencies. For more information visit www.thechildrensfoundation.co.uk, call 0191 282 0000 or email b.e.welsh@ncl.ac.uk.

The 'Nursery Talk' Project : Meeting the communication needs of early years children.

Emma Smith – Nursery Talk Speech & Language Therapist, Worcestershire Primary Care Trust, Worcestershire County Council.

Since October 2004, two whole time equivalent Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs) have been funded by the Worcestershire Early Years and Childcare Service.

Nursery Talk is the largest scale study in the country using adult-child interaction techniques in pre-school settings.

The half-termly training cycle consists of one formal training session, and three to four one-to-one video tutorials, plus further demonstration and co-working within the setting. Weekly visits are made by the SLT to the setting where the self-reflection and monitoring skills of staff members are encouraged and developed. The training helps support theory into practice by using the one-to-one video feedback sessions that capture the interactions between staff and children and allow in-depth discussion and focused target setting.

Children who are 'less' talkative are the focus of this training, which is also known as 'Tune in to Children'. The ethos is to promote the status of language and communication within daily tasks in nursery and to facilitate a more child-led approach to these. The types of language scaffolding techniques that we know are useful with young children, i.e. questioning less, commenting more, reflective listening etc. are heavily promoted and modelled.

Due to the structure and practical nature of the training cycle the staff and SLT develop good relationships. This enables the staff member to explore new techniques and strategies in a safe and secure environment. Discussions more often than not turn to wider issues of curriculum differentiation, nursery routines and specific targets / strategies.

The results of the first 18 months of the project were striking and showed a very positive shift in nursery staff's abilities to modify their interaction behaviours. The training was successful in reducing the numbers of questions asked by staff in interactions and therefore an increase in the numbers of comments made by the staff. The focus of the comments was also analysed and showed a positive increase in the number of comments relating to the child's (rather than the adult's) focus of attention.

Staff also reported feeling more confident to deal with 'less talkative' children in their setting and felt that some of their previously held unhelpful beliefs had been positively challenged. Support is also given to parents through short workshops, home visiting and the production and circulation of written resources.

In every nursery, anecdotal evidence continues to show that, through the training, children grew in confidence to talk in the setting. The relationship that is built between the member of staff and the child is always very strong and this appears to assist in the child's confidence to use their communication skills with others in the setting.

Many children who had previously been on the periphery of nursery life are now more fully engaged with both adults and peers. On a professional level many strong contacts and working relationships have been forged between the local Speech and Language Therapists and colleagues within local settings and Early Years Education across the county. The project is also providing the stimulus for more joint initiatives, e.g. resource packs for all settings developed with the local mentor teachers and training for childminders. All this, and the project is still in the process of development.