

Twin Talk

For parents and carers of twins and other multiples

Your babies are ready to communicate with you from the moment they are born. Most brain development occurs from birth to age two, so babies and toddlers need stimulation and attention to make the most of this opportunity.

The best way to stimulate babies' brains is to talk to them as much as possible. Talking and listening to children helps them develop good language and communication skills. This enables them to learn and to develop relationships as they grow.

Twin Talk is a resource that provides information and tips to help parents and carers communicate well with their children, enhancing the individuality of their twins and other multiple babies. Making a point of communicating well will also help you to bond with them.



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All babies can communicate before they start talking; in fact they want to relate to people and do so with babbles and smiles. Babies are born sociable and come into the world with a willingness to interact and learn. It is important that from day one parents build individual relationships with children who are born as part of a multiple group, to help them develop their own sense of themselves as separate from their siblings.

TIP: Embrace the individuality of each child. Research has shown that it will help your children's development and characterisation if they are treated as individuals in their own right.

- Call each baby by his name and refrain from using labels like 'the twins'. Encourage friends and family to do the same.
- Address questions and comments to just one child at a time, while making eye contact.
- Encourage turn-taking in your conversations with both of them.

The Twins and Multiple Births Association (Tamba) is a charity set up by parents of twins, triplets and higher multiples and interested professionals. It is the only UK wide organisation that directly helps tens of thousands of parents and professionals to meet the unique challenges that multiple birth families face. Visit www.tamba.org.uk or call the freephone - Twinline on 0800 138 0509.

Talk To Your Baby is the National Literacy Trust's early years language campaign to encourage parents and carers to talk more to their children from birth to three. Visit www.talktoyourbaby.org.uk.

Some twins develop language later than single children. There are several factors that can cause this.

- Twins are typically born prematurely or as low birthweight babies which can slow their progress at first.
- Parents have less time for individual language activities than parents of single children.
- It is not uncommon for children to see their siblings as role models for speaking. As twins are the same age, it's possible that they will copy each other's language. This is called idioglossia.

Idioglossia, or 'Twin Language', is simply the use and reinforcement of immature language



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TIP: Actively create opportunities to talk to one child at a time. By sharing special songs, books, and games with each child you help develop their own interests.

- Nappy changing time can be the perfect opportunity to speak with a baby alone. Choose separate nursery rhymes to share with each child.
- While one child is playing a game, read a book with the other. Later, have the children swap places and read a different book.
- If possible, bathe the children separately one night during the week.
- Arrange some separate outings when you can.

TIP: Applaud each child's voice and personality

- Twins often speak for each other so if one is less outgoing than the other, he will not practise his talking as much as he would a singleton.
- Since there is more competition to get attention, children tend to speak more quickly in order to get all the information out at once. This can lead to faster speech that is not clear and is difficult to understand.
- Support the development of individual interests but try not to insist on it. Fostering individuality can mean allowing a child to do the same as her sibling.
- Encourage each child to speak for himself. If one twin is particularly quiet during a conversation, turn directly to him and ask his opinion.
- When a twin follows a direction correctly, praise her individually.
- Pause before you speak to your children and encourage them to do the same. This will help them learn to listen and will slow the conversation down, encouraging clear speech.

The most important thing to do to help your twin children develop their language is to pay as much individual attention to each child as possible. Family members, such as grandparents and older siblings can help you to do this.



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