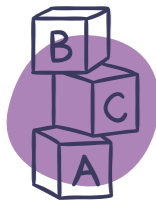


Have a go

Spina Bifida
Hydrocephalus
Scotland



have a go



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This booklet is great to read by itself but at points we make reference to two ‘films’. These films are programmes made by SBH Scotland to show activities which are hands on and encourage learning through play. To watch them please visit

www.sbhscotland.org.uk/have-a-go

Baby



A new baby is not a complete stranger. They have been building bonds with us from before they were born. When they enter the world there will be sounds and voices they recognise and they will gain a lot of comfort and security from this.



Communicating

Getting to know you, me, us



Communication happens in all sorts of ways and you can help your baby to feel safe and secure from the start. This is important to bring on healthy development.

While young babies don't understand or think in words, it won't be long until they start babbling, then making recognisable sounds that eventually turn into words, sentences, questions and conversations. **Did you know that most of the vocabulary we will use in our lives is learned in the first five years?** So, hearing words and starting to understand when they are used, are the first steps in baby learning to talk.

Communication is not just about learning to talk though! Communication is about understanding how we relate to other people. It's about knowing that we listen as well as talk; we take turns. It's about getting to know that the ways our speech, faces and bodies change, link to how we feel; angry, sad, happy, or excited. Your baby will quickly learn to hear those changes in your voice and they will know

which sounds are happy sounds, which sounds are the ones that make them feel safe, which sounds are the ones that comfort them when they're hungry, tired or sore. And babies are a lot smarter than you might think, because they'll start to link those sounds with how you look and feel; that a smile is linked to happy sounds; that a soft and gentle cuddle is linked to the cooing sounds that make them feel safe and loved.

So, communicating with baby is the first and best gift you can give, and it's free!



Communication happens in all sorts of ways and it will happen even if some of baby's senses don't work as well as others. What can you do?



Facial expression

- There is evidence that babies start to imitate facial expressions from being moments old. This is one reason that you should be face to face with baby as often as you can; when they are in their buggy, when they're getting their nappy changed; when they are being fed, for example. Babies will love to study your face and work out what it's telling them. Just as we saw Luna and Louisa doing in their film, they will look for eye contact to feel reassured that you are connected to them and their needs.
- Use your eye contact and the toys that your baby likes to encourage them to move their eyes and head. Following things of different sizes, held at different distances, as they move from side to side, and up and down, is helping to develop your baby's vision. You might need to experiment a bit with distance because where baby can see things, and hold their gaze, will change as their vision changes. Activities like this (with the pom-poms and feathers that we saw Luna and Louisa playing with) help baby's brain development too which will help them with learning as they grow.
- Imitate your baby's expressions and watch them do the same - this is the start of conversation; of taking turns.
- Seeing you make funny or silly faces, or hearing funny sounds, might just be enough to say to baby, "It's all fine, you don't need to feel grouchy, let's have a giggle together."
- Bring your baby's finger to your face and let them feel your expression. Then you can blow raspberries on little hands, feet and tummies. As baby gets a wee bit older, this will be hilarious!



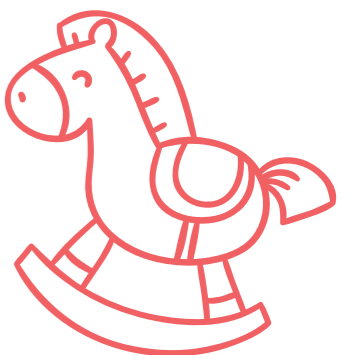
Touch

- Lots of cuddles and being close. Introduce a book at bedtime – it’s never too early. Use books with colour and texture; gradually moving on to books that baby can interact with as they get better at using hands and fingers.
 - Washing, dressing, getting a nappy changed are all times that you touch your baby. They will sense kind and confident hands. These are great times to sing songs or talk about their bodies and what you are doing. Sing songs you know or make it up as you go along – even if it’s nonsense!
 - Like we saw in the film with Luna and Louisa, use things that have lots of different textures and let your baby feel them with their hands, feet or against their faces. The girls loved the feathers, the pom-poms and even the pot scourers!
 - When baby can get hold of things for themselves they will put them in their mouths. We saw how Luna and Louisa wanted to play with those bells! As adults we sometimes worry about this but as long as you know the things they are playing with are clean and safe* – this is fine!! Baby’s mouths are much more sensitive to temperature, texture and shape so they use this sense to learn about things in their world. And sometimes it just brings a bit of relief to those sore gums!
- *Always make sure that babies and children are never left alone with objects that they could swallow. Make sure that any objects which may be put in the mouth are clean and are completely safe.



Position and Movement

- Move around in different ways with baby. We saw Luna and Louisa playing and singing ‘Row, row, row your boat’. This contact and movement, linked to a song, tells baby a lot about their world:
 - I am moving in different ways but I feel secure because someone has a good hold of me.
 - I can move fast or slow, up and down or side to side. I am learning rhythm and that rhythm is used in language.
 - I can see the person that’s holding me and they are smiling and making happy sounds – this is fun!
- Use different kinds of movement: Standing and swaying; bouncing on knees; ‘flying’ through the air; ‘swimming’ on tummies; dancing! You will work out what your baby likes best and when different types of movement work best, like:
 - Gentle swaying with a soft song just before bed makes baby content and sleepy – they feel safe.
 - A fun song with some bouncing or tickling might be a great way to distract baby from that grumbly moment that was just about to start.
- Tummy time isn’t always popular with babies but it is important in helping them to get stronger. Do your best to make it fun by being at eye level, singing, smiling and using different props – just like we saw Luna and Louisa doing. Start with little bits of tummy time as soon as your baby is able to support their head and build it up gradually.
- It will take a little while before your baby is able to sit up on their own but you can support your baby in a seated position in different ways. If you have a physiotherapist or occupational therapist they may be able to give you some tips or equipment to help with this. As soon as they can support their heads, getting baby upright is really important. Not just to build strength, it actually helps to bring on the development of the nerves that link the brain to the baby’s arms, legs and other parts of the body. Then, when baby does get to the stage of sitting unsupported, they are more likely to be ready to reach and get hold of things.





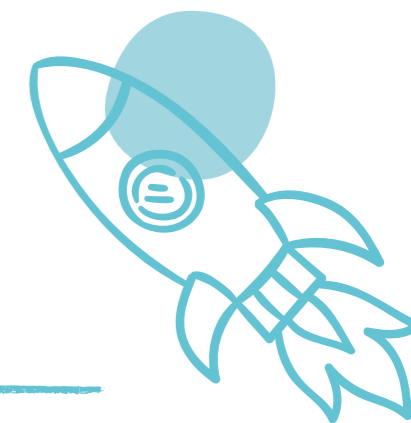
Voice

- Remember, that baby's first use of their voice is through crying. Crying is the only way they can tell you they need something: A cuddle; some food; a nappy change or, to have a sleep perhaps! It's sometimes hard to work it out and it takes a lot of patience but there's always a message in there.
- Just keep talking, about everything! It might sound silly but not only is your baby loving the sound of your voice, they will be learning that those sounds have meaning. Gradually they will imitate the sounds you make. You can imitate baby's sounds too, then it's a conversation!
- At some point baby will start to reach and to point. Pointing is a sign that they want you to get involved: maybe just to chat about something (the cat or the dog that just went past); or maybe to play with a favourite toy.
- As baby gets older, and as you keep talking to them, they will learn more and more about how language works and they will want to get involved.



Baby to Toddler

Learning Together



We started looking at communication and ended up covering lots of different things. We've looked at different ways of playing and being with your baby and we hope that this will help you as you watch your baby change and grow before your eyes.

The basics stay the same. Keep looking, listening and talking. Watch for the little changes that show your baby is developing, progressing and learning! But please remember that all children do, and learn, things at different times and that's okay. With every little change, whenever it comes, offers an opportunity for you to help them move on to the next stage.

Once they are sitting (with or without help) and perhaps move on to crawling, standing or walking, or moving around in a scoot or chair, they will find more and more ways to explore their world. With every exploration there is a chance to learn and progress, for both of you.

- Learn about baby's likes and dislikes. Think about how you can use baby's likes to encourage them to try new things.

- Use whatever you find when you're out and about, or things you have in the house to make, invent, sing, talk and have fun!
- Look for new skills like dropping, throwing, carrying, hiding, pushing and pulling. Yes, they might do all these things with food or your house keys and that might be a bit annoying, but, it's a little world of experimentation and you can help them to develop their skills by finding ways for them to do all these things in a safe, fun and playful way.
- Baby is learning that their hands and bodies can do more and more things. You can help them learn with books, games and toys.

At SBH Scotland we hope you enjoyed watching Luna and Louise in our Have A Go Baby Programme and reading a bit more about all the fun things you can do with your baby and why it's important.



It's only a few things to think about but there's a lot more out there. Maybe you know other parents that you can share ideas with?

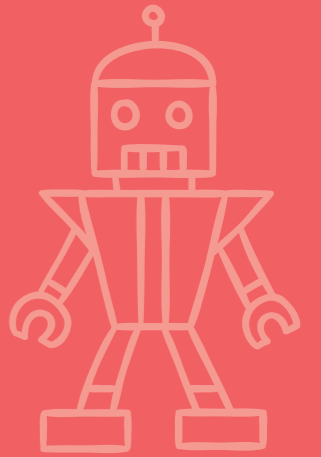
Play, read, laugh, love, have fun and remember the best fun and learnings often happen when you explore and try things out for yourself. SO, go ahead and HAVE A GO!

Make a little time every day to talk, listen, read, play and have fun, not only can you help your baby develop and learn, but you build rich and meaningful relationships with them. Their relationships with you and other significant adults give your baby the most amazing start, and increase their chances of growing into happy, confident people with the capacity to deal with life's challenges and seek life's joys.

To watch the 'Have A Go – Baby' show please visit:
sbhscotland.org.uk/have-a-go



2-5 Years



Once your child reaches the age of two they are likely to have changed a lot from that little baby that first entered your world. They may have found different ways to become mobile and to communicate with you.



Learning and Developing



Your child may be finding and playing with books, games and toys of their choosing, and getting more and more expert at doing a variety of things.

Or, they may need a lot of support from you to encourage them to keep trying new things. The speed at which children grow, develop and learn varies but whatever the speed, you can help them to move on by spotting when they are ready. **So, how do you know when they are ready?** That's a tricky question to answer but you know your child best and you will learn to recognise the signals they give you.



Repetition

Repetition - Doing things over and over again as they learn to 'master' and enjoy a new skill.

You can help them to move on by giving them opportunities to practice the skill in different ways, or to build on it. For example, they might pour bath water from container to container every time they bath. Just as in our Have a Go film, you might make musical instruments that require your child to pour different things like rice, dried beans or peas into varying sizes of container. This helps to develop your child's motor skills as they learn to adjust the: grip, direction, rate of pouring, for example.

When your child becomes better at pouring different things, why not get them involved in baking? You can introduce quantities/ measurement and show how different substances have different properties (e.g. flour, milk, butter), as they attempt to 'pour' and mix them. If you want to avoid sweet things, you could make bread, or play dough. These involve lots of kneading which is another great way to strengthen little hands.

Perhaps your child likes the same book read over and over again. Becoming familiar with something brings security and this is fine. You can try to extend the way the book is used by pointing out different things in the pictures or asking your child to find things. They might be able to remember what comes next in the story or even in the text / words. You can start to follow the words with your finger so that your child begins to learn that the printed word also has meaning. Perhaps you can find different books about the same character? As your child gets older you might encourage them to make up different endings or alternative stories that involve the same characters.

These are only a few ideas. The main point is to watch for patterns in your child's play because those patterns show that their brains are developing and strengthening new connections: **they are learning.**



Questioning

Questioning - Can start with pointing accompanied by noises of interest or excitement. It may develop into a single word or simple phrase e.g. "Why?" or "What's that?"

A child's question is a signal that they want you to share in their thinking. They might not have the language to tell you their thoughts but this is a perfect opportunity for you to give words to things e.g. "Would you like some apple to eat?"; "Will we go and fetch the ball?" Simple phrases like this help children learn that things have names and actions can be described. They start to learn that language has a pattern, a structure.

As children learn more words, their questions will become more complex too. There will be lots and lots of opportunity to chat, discuss, exchange ideas. Children love information but remember to ask them what they think as well as telling them 'stuff' or exactly how to do something.

Children will naturally create their own theories about things and this is the start of 'problem solving'. It's never too early to start training the brain to work things out! Remember the 'problem solvers' we saw

when some of our children were making bird feeders in the film? Some rolled the cone in seed, some dipped it and some used their pincer grip to pick up individual seeds.

An adult might think there's a 'right' or 'better' way to do it but these children were each experimenting and learning different things. By watching others, and perhaps with some gentle guidance, they will discover that different ways work 'best' at different times.

Your child's questions are also a great opportunity to introduce books or watch a 'how to do' video, for example. This will teach your child that there are different ways of finding things out. If you have shared your child's success in finding out information, or asked them questions to help them work something out, they will become more independent in doing these things, as they grow older.

These are only a few examples. The main point is to get involved in talking with your child regularly. Answer and ask questions. Help them to help themselves and watch their independence grow.



‘Boredom’ or Frustration

‘Boredom’ or Frustration - When your child abandons something and / or they show disinterest or get cross.

There may be a lot of different reasons that your child becomes a bit cross or grumpy. They could be tired, hungry or feeling a bit poorly, for example. You may recognise the reason really quickly and sometimes it might take you a while to work it out. Staying calm and being patient while you work it out, and find the answer (e.g. food, a sleep, a cuddle), will help your child learn how to manage their emotions as they get older.

Frustration or ‘boredom’ whilst involved in an activity could be a signal that something is either a bit too easy or too difficult. Perhaps your child needs a bit more challenge to keep them interested, or maybe they are missing a bit of information and need a clue to help them move on. Remember the little girl in our film, she showed great delight when she realised that, with a little bit of help, she could get the tape to stick her musical instrument together? Again, being calm and patient and helping your child work out the answer or next steps, will help them learn that there is a way to work it out.



There’s no doubt that these moments are some of the hardest to deal with as a parent. It can be even harder if you’re tired or not feeling great yourself. The main point is that when your child grumbles or gets upset, they’re not doing it to be annoying. They are trying to tell you something that they can’t put into words. If you can stay calm, it will help you work out what’s going on, and your child will learn that they don’t need to get upset because you didn’t.



Enjoyment

Enjoyment - This could be a combination of repetition, questions and sheer pleasure seen in your child’s face, laughs, giggles and excitement.

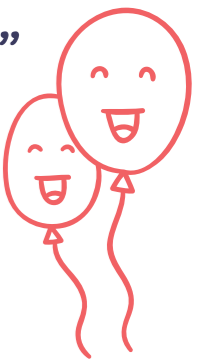
Young children often become very attached to certain books, toys or games. Or perhaps they show lots of interest in one topic: animals; trucks; a favourite TV character, for example. Your child’s interest and enjoyment is a fantastic opportunity to support their development and learning.

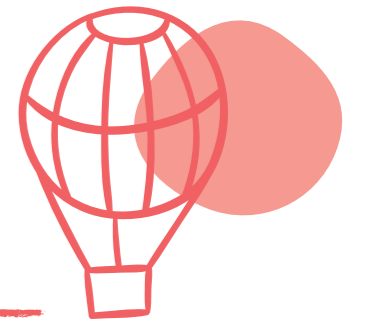
There are probably loads of things you could go out and buy to fit with your child’s interest but maybe you don’t have to. Think about borrowing books from the library or doing toy swaps with friends. Best of all, there might be enough to fascinate your child, right on your doorstep; like the pinecones and stones that the children used in our film. Or from the recycling box: Tubs, containers, and bottles that can be used to invent and make.

The ideas are endless and will be led by your own child’s interests, likes and dislikes. The main point is to keep talking! Showing interest and excitement in something that your child is enjoying will not only encourage them to ‘go with you’ in your joint discoveries and learning, it will make them feel valued and loved.



“laughs, giggles and excitement”





Guiding Principles

All sounds easy, doesn't it?

This information is designed to reach many people who will all be different in the way that they parent, and who will all have different children, with different likes, dislikes and needs, for example:

- Your child's signals that they need comfort, help or support, and that they are ready, interested or motivated to learn may look, or feel different, to what has been described.
- How quickly, or easily, a child will become involved in play will change from child to child, and may change from day to day for each child.
- Sometimes it might seem impossible to comfort, distract, or move on from a 'sticking point'.
- Sometimes progress looks, and feels, different from what has been described here or in other publications, or from other children of the same age and stage.

So, no, it's not easy and just when you think you've tuned in to your small child's needs, it all changes again. Or, maybe things don't seem to progress as quickly as you feel they should. This can be a source of worry and let's face it:

all parents do worry!

Given that all parents and all children are different, it would be impossible to cover every situation so here are a few guiding principles that should serve you well, wherever you and your child are in your first few years together (and beyond).



Behaviour

Try to:

- Recognise success, achievements and 'good' behaviours with cuddles, high fives, cheers or victory dances, for example.
- Make a big fuss about even the smallest thing, particularly if it's heading in the right direction.
- Tell / describe to your child what they have done well.
- Ignore 'annoying' behaviours unless they are dangerous or harmful to the child or someone else.
- Put things that you don't want played with or touched, out of reach.

Why?

When a parent (or significant adult) repeatedly pays attention (praising OR telling off) to something the child does ('good' or 'bad'), the child is likely to repeat those things. So, reward the good things and hope they become 'good habits'. Trying hard to be successful can become a 'good habit'. That is why it's useful to praise small things and the effort the child has put in. This will build your child's confidence to keep trying, even when they find it hard.

Try to avoid:

- Telling children off repeatedly, particularly for the same things.

Emotional Reaction

Try to:

- Stay calm and patient.

Try to avoid:

- Getting upset / angry.

Why?

Your emotional reaction teaches your child about how to cope with different situations.



Pay Attention

✓ Try to:

- Make time to give your child your full attention. Get out and about in your local area, and sing, read and play with/about whatever interests them.

✗ Try to avoid:

- Having the TV on, checking your mobile phone, chatting to someone else, for example.

? Why?

- A bit of undivided attention will do great things for your child's self-esteem.
- Picking up and playing with things in inventive ways will build their interest in the world, their imagination and problem solving skills.



Keep Talking

✓ Try to:

- Even when you're busy, keep talking about what you're doing.
- Answer their questions, even if it's just to delay things a bit (and remember to come back to it later!)

✗ Try to avoid:

- Ignoring your child or shutting them down.

? Why?

- Talking about every day things teaches your child about language and helps their speech development.
- Getting a response and keeping to the promises you've made will make your child feel valued and secure.



Progression

✓ Try to:

- Enjoy your child's progress, development and learning with them. Focus on their strengths.

✗ Try to avoid:

- Comparing their progress with others in an unfavourable way.

? Why?

- Every child progresses at its own rate. They all have different strengths and recognising them builds confidence and self-esteem.



Follow Their Lead

✓ Try to:

- Persevere, even when it's tough. If something doesn't work, try something else.
- Let your child lead you.

✗ Try to avoid:

- 'Forcing' something just because it 'makes sense' to the adult.

? Why?

- By following your child's lead, you will help them build on the brain connections they already have. Your child will not have the same understanding of the world that you do.



Be Positive

✓ Try to:

- Try your best to be as positive as you can.

✗ Try to avoid:

- Beating yourself up when you can't keep it up all the time.

? Why?

- Because we're all human!

There's a lot to think about isn't there?



Children with spina bifida and/or hydrocephalus may have a different set of challenges from many of their peers. However, there are also lots of 'stages' and 'phases' that most children go through – that's why all parents worry!

Every child will develop, make progress and learn in their own way and at their own pace. In the first few years of their life you can make all the difference by seeing and celebrating your child's strengths, and giving them lots of opportunities to build on them.

Their relationships with you and other significant adults give your child the most amazing start, and will increase their chances of growing into happy, confident people with the capacity to deal with life's challenges and seek life's joys.

**Play, read, laugh,
love and have fun!**

If you, or your child, are affected by spina bifida and/or hydrocephalus and you have questions regarding your child's development please contact our Direct Services Support Team via our Helpline: 03455 211 300 or via Email: support@sbhscotland.org.uk



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