

# Stages of attention development

Information for parents and carers



Follow us on Twitter @NHSaaa



Find us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/nhsaaa](http://www.facebook.com/nhsaaa)



Visit our website: [www.nhsaaa.net](http://www.nhsaaa.net)



All our publications are available in other formats



- 0 – 1 years: Extremely distractible.
- 1 – 2 years: Concentrates on task of own choosing.
- 2 - 3 years: Can shift attention from one activity to another with adult's help.
- 3 – 4 years: Can switch attention without adult's help.
- 4 – 5 years: Attention is two way.
- 5 – 6 years: Attention is established and sustained.

## Development of attention

### What to expect and when

#### 0-3 months:

- Build interaction skills – eye contact, turn-taking and pausing – these are the foundation of all later communication development.
- Copying games help to establish neural pathways needed to develop communication.

- Singing.
- Talk in very short sentences.

### 3- 6 months

- Different cries to communicate needs.
- Tickling games, peek-a-boo.
- The adult should use key words (such as ‘up’).
- Repetitive songs and rhymes.
- Label everyday objects and events as they happen.

### 6-9 months

- Responding to environmental sounds
- Babble begins – copy baby’s sounds to build a conversation without words.
- Beginning to relate key words to objects and events (such as, “milk”, “bye bye”)

### 9-12 months

- Understanding of key words is developing – talk in short sentences of one to two words, use gesture and pointing.
- Baby may be using “bu” “mu” and “du” – model the word you think they’re trying to say.
- Leave a space for baby to respond when you play turn-taking games.
- Copying games (such as, clapping, making faces) to build turn-taking through play.
- Use baby’s name before speaking to get attention.

# Development of attention

## What to expect and when

### 18 months – 2 years

- Attention to activities is developing but can't shift between activity and spoken instruction – need to say child's name, ensure they've stopped what they're doing, and then speak to them.
- May be understanding up to 100 words – still benefit from short, simple sentences of two to three words – use clear facial expression and gesture to support understanding.
- May be using up to 50 words and beginning to combine them (such as “Daddy car”).
- May be using speech sounds “p,b,m,w” now – model correct pronunciation of words but don't expect child to repeat.
- Pretend play is developing.

### 2.5 – 3 years

- Attention to activities is developing but may still find it difficult to shift between activity and spoken instructions – say child's name, and ensure they've stopped what they're doing to speak to them – don't assume the whole group will listen!
- Use sentences of two to three key words to highlight words they know.
- Beginning to understand concepts like “big/little” and “in/on/under”.

- May be using sentences of two to six words, asking simple questions and talking about what has already happened – model correct sentence structure but don't expect child to repeat it.

### 3-4 years

- Understanding longer sentences with three to four key words (such as, “put your farm animals in the box”).
- Beginning to use pronouns “he/she” and asking “why?” questions.
- May experience some developmental non-fluency (stumbling over words) as spoken language progresses rapidly – give time to finish speaking, maintain eye contact, don't comment on how words are said.
- May not be able to produce and use sounds like “f, l, y, th, r, s, ch, j” – model correct pronunciation without expecting child to repeat.

### 4-5 years

- Understanding questions and concepts of time (such as, yesterday, morning).
- Understands most everyday conversations.
- Beginning to enjoy rhymes and word play.
- May still have difficulty using tenses correctly (such as, “I runned”) – model correct structure without expecting child to repeat.

“CHATTER MATTERS” [www.ican.org.uk](http://www.ican.org.uk)

## How to increase your child’s attention and listening skills

Increasing your child’s attention and listening skills can help their understanding of what is said to them.

### Activities to help your child

- Make sure you have your child’s attention before speaking to them. Be face-to-face and make eye contact to make sure they are listening to you.
- Background noise such as other people talking, television and so on is a distraction – try to reduce it where possible and have quiet time.
- Keep tasks and instructions short.
- Ask your child to copy a simple rhythm on a drum such as, two quick beats, a pause, one quick beat. You can make a drum using an empty margarine tub.
- Put some objects which make different noises in front of your child. When your child shuts their eyes, make the noise of the object – for example, shake the keys. Ask your child to identify the object. When they can identify each one, see if they can identify two sounds, in the correct order.
- Make up a story with your child’s name in it or change the name of a storybook character to that

of your child's. Ask them to clap their hands every time they hear their name.

- Tell your child silly sentences such as, 'It's sunny outside, so I'm going to wear my wellies'! See if they can work out why they're silly.
- Asking for objects – show your child a range of objects and ask for two or three items. See if they can remember the items in the correct order.

### Ideas for games

- Play pretend shopping and ask for some items such as, 'a biscuit and an apple, please' (you can use real tins, fruit or toy ones).
- Use a suitcase and real or doll's clothes – ask your child to pack for a holiday – for example, 'Pack trousers and a scarf'.
- Make a post box out of a shoebox, cut some pictures out of a comic or magazine and ask your child to post them.
- Play 'Simple Simon Says' or 'Do this, Do That'.
- Following commands – ask your child to:
  - Point to two or three body parts
  - Give you related objects such as, plastic farm animals, doll's furniture.
  - Give you unrelated objects (harder to do) such as, a sock and a book.

All of our publications are available in different languages, larger print, braille (English only), audio tape or another format of your choice.

Wszystkie nasze publikacje są dostępne w różnych językach, dużym drukiem, brajlem (tylko w wersji angielskiej), na taśmie dźwiękowej lub w innym formacie Twojego wyboru.

我們所有的印刷品均有不同語言版本、大字體版本、盲文（僅有英文）、錄音帶版本或你想要的另外形式供選擇。

كافة مطبوعاتنا متاحة بلغات مختلفة و بالأحرف الطباعية الكبيرة و بطريقة بريل الخاصة بالمكفوفين (باللغة الإنكليزية فقط) و على شريط كاسيت سمعي أو بصيغة بديلة حسب خيارك.

Tha gach sgrìobhainn againn rim faotainn ann an diofar chànanan, clò nas motha, Braille (Beurla a-mhàin), teip claidinn no riochd eile a tha sibh airson a thaghadh.

हमारे सब प्रकाशन अनेक भाषाओं, बड़े अक्षरों की छपाई, ब्रेल (केवल अंग्रेज़ी), सुनने वाली कसेट या आपकी पसंदनुसार किसी अन्य फॉरमेट (आरूप) में भी उपलब्ध हैं।

我們所有的印刷品均有不同語言版本、大字体版本、盲文（仅有英文）、录音带版本或你想要的另外形式供选择。

ہماری تمام مطبوعات مختلف زبانوں، بڑے حروف کی چھپائی، بریل (صرف انگریزی)، سننے والی کسٹ یا آپ کی پسند کے مطابق کسی دیگر صورت (فارمیٹ) میں بھی دستیاب ہیں۔

ਸਾਡੇ ਸਾਰੇ ਪਰਚੇ ਅਤੇ ਕਿਤਾਬਚੇ ਵਗੈਰਾ ਵੱਖ ਵੱਖ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ ਵਿਚ, ਵੱਡੇ ਅੱਖਰਾਂ ਅਤੇ ਬ੍ਰੇਲ (ਸਿਰਫ ਅੰਗਰੇਜ਼ੀ) ਵਿਚ, ਆਡੀਓ ਟੇਪ 'ਤੇ ਜਾਂ ਤੁਹਾਡੀ ਮਰਜ਼ੀ ਅਨੁਸਾਰ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪ ਵਿਚ ਵੀ ਮਿਲ ਸਕਦੇ ਹਨ।



0800 169 1441



## Tell us what you think...

If you would like to comment on any issues raised by this document, please complete this form and return it to: Communications Department, 28 Lister Street, University Hospital Crosshouse, Crosshouse KA2 0BB. You can also email us at: [comms@aaaht.scot.nhs.uk](mailto:comms@aaaht.scot.nhs.uk). If you provide your contact details, we will acknowledge your comments and pass them to the appropriate departments for a response.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Comment \_\_\_\_\_