



Chapter 2

Children who cannot hear well need help early

In their first years of life, all children, including children who are deaf or cannot hear well, will learn more skills and learn them more quickly and easily than at any other time in their lives. Their physical development is easy to see. First they crawl, and then they walk and run.

Children also start to develop mentally as soon as they are born. The baby's brain is like a sponge that has a great capacity to absorb new things. During the first years, children who can hear learn language very quickly. As their language and communication develop, their ability to think also grows. That is why it is very important for parents to help children who are deaf or cannot hear well learn a language as early as possible. With a language, children who cannot hear well can also develop their mental abilities.

Now it's
your
turn!



How children develop new skills

Every child develops in 4 main areas: body (physical), thinking (mental), talking and listening (communication), and getting along with other people (social). In each area, a child learns new skills step by step.

For example, before a child can learn to walk, she must first learn many simple kinds of body control:

- ① First, she learns to hold her head up and to move her arms and legs.



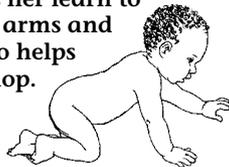
- ② Then she can use her arms and legs to sit up.



- ③ While sitting, she can reach and turn, which improves her balance.



- ④ Crawling helps her learn to coordinate her arms and legs, which also helps her brain develop.

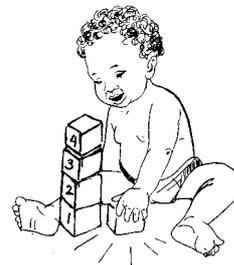


- ⑤ Then she pulls herself up to a standing position.



In all areas of development, each new skill a child learns builds on the skills she already knows and makes it possible for her to learn other, more difficult skills.

When a child does not learn a skill, she cannot learn other skills that depend on it. For example, if she has a problem holding up her head, she will then have difficulty learning skills like sitting or crawling, in which holding up the head is important.

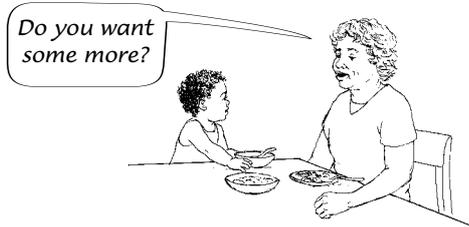


Each new skill builds on already-learned skills, like building blocks.

CHILDREN'S COMMUNICATION SKILLS AND LANGUAGE ALSO DEVELOP STEP BY STEP

Children's language develops in the same way as their physical skills. They learn simple skills first.

- ① Babies begin to express their thoughts, needs and feelings by making sounds or using facial expressions and pointing.



- ② They hear and understand other people's words.



- ③ They begin to use words. They know and use names of the people closest to them.



- ④ Later they start to talk and express themselves more completely.



- ⑤ Words help them think and learn new things.



Learning language

When you are surrounded by words, it is easy to learn the language that people in a community speak. Children learn language as they listen to people talk to each other and watch what happens, and as they talk to other people. Language becomes a way for them to understand their experiences and how the world around them works.

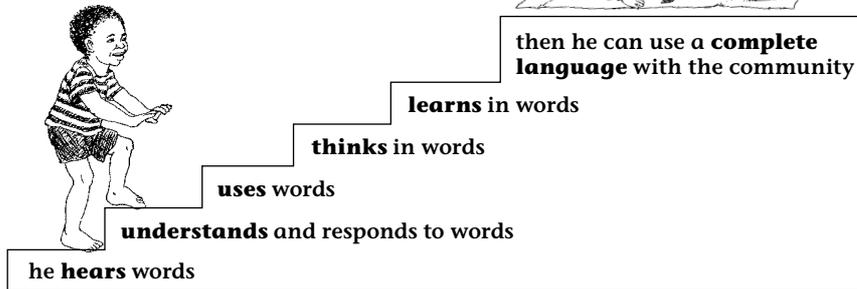
Learning a spoken language is difficult for children who cannot hear

When children cannot hear well, they will have difficulty understanding simple spoken words. And children need to understand many simple words to learn a language.

When they know many words, they can learn more advanced communication skills, such as speaking in sentences or engaging in conversation. Children who are deaf or cannot hear well need help to learn skills like saying simple words or doing things that depend on simple communication, like taking turns.



A child learns a language in steps



But without the first steps of hearing or understanding...



...he cannot learn a language, so he cannot develop his thinking or communicate.

He has no way to become part of the community, and gets left out.

HOW LANGUAGE HELPS THE MIND DEVELOP

Language enables children to think, to plan, to understand the world around them, and to be a part of a community. Without language, children cannot develop their minds.

When children cannot hear, and do not get help learning a language to communicate, they will face problems in their mental development. Many parents with young deaf children or children with hearing loss are glad if the children learn a few simple words or gestures. But children need more than this. They need to learn a language.

A deaf child needs to learn language early, so that she can use it to talk to herself, that is, to think. Expressing ideas in words makes it possible to think about those ideas.



Because she knows the words for bigger and smaller, Amina can learn how to compare sizes. Without language she cannot learn this.



Because she has words for doing things in order, Rosa can plan.

She also needs language to express her ideas to others, to tell people what she wants or needs. She needs language to understand explanations. Through communicating with others, she learns about the world around her. This helps her mind to develop and lets her relate to people.



Without language a child may not know why he must stay away from dangers. Dan cannot understand why they must keep the well covered.

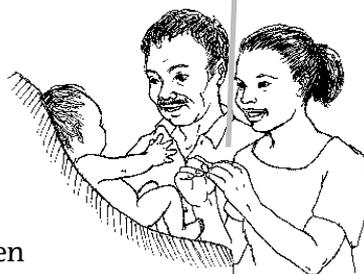


Without a way for her mother to explain, Evi does not understand how her mother knows that someone is at the door.

Deaf children need help early

With help, children who cannot hear can communicate and learn language. Since babies start learning as soon as they are born, it is important that families begin giving extra attention to communication to help their deaf children as soon as possible. If children who cannot hear well have help to learn a language — and that language may be a sign language — they can understand and communicate with people around them. Then they can learn what other children usually learn by hearing.

*Do you want
another kiss
from mama?*



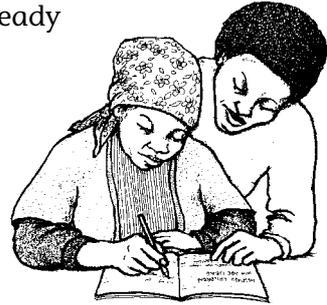
If the child's hearing problem is noticed early and effective help is provided, the best years for learning language and communication skills (birth to age 7) will not be lost. See Chapters 7, 8, and 9 for more information about helping a child learn language.

How to know if your child needs help

Babies develop at their own pace. Some develop more quickly than others. But most children grow and develop new skills at about the same age. By age 2, most children can speak or sign about 50 to 200 words. A child usually knows about 900 words at age 3, and 1500 words by age 4.

The important thing is that a child continue to learn new skills. But when a child is not learning a skill even long after other children her age have learned it, this is usually a sign that she may have a problem or need extra help.

This chart describes some of the communication skills children learn and when most children learn them. Parents can use the chart to decide which skills their children already know, and which skills they need to learn. To decide what activities to do first, start by asking yourself, "Is my child doing everything that other children his age are doing?" For more information on the ages and order in which children usually learn new skills, see the Child Development Charts on pages 231 to 238.

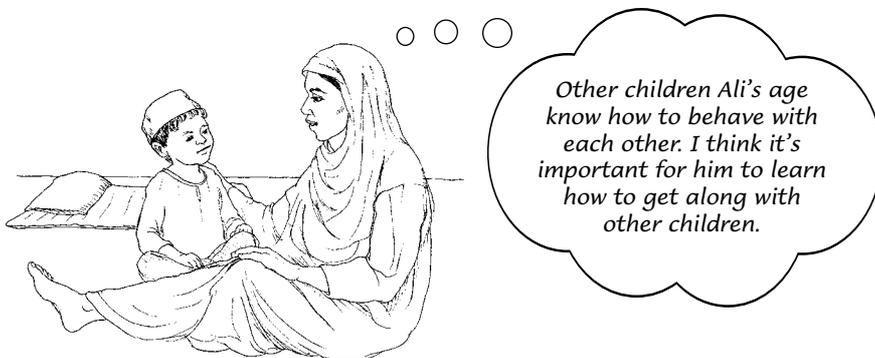


<p>3 months</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • responds to familiar voices or faces • reacts to sudden sounds or movements 	<p>6 months</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • makes simple sounds or gestures • turns head toward movements or sounds 
<p>1 year</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • joins sounds together or repeats hand shapes • begins to name things • understands and responds to simple words or signs • imitates single signs 	<p>2 years</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses simple words or signs • uses sentences with 2 and 3 words or signs • knows 50 to 200 words or signs 
<p>3 years</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understands most simple language • knows and uses 500 to 1000 words or signs 	<p>5 years</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • talks or signs about what he has done • asks many questions 

NOTE: Some children who cannot hear well may have other problems. Their minds and bodies could be slow to develop for other reasons. See the book *Disabled Village Children* for more information on how to help a child whose mind and/or body are slow to develop.

YOU CAN HELP YOUR CHILD LEARN

If you think your child's communication is not developing as it should, you can help him learn. Parents often think that only someone with professional training can help their child. But as a parent, you know your child better than anyone else, so you can make a big difference in his development.



In Chapters 3 to 9 you can find information about:

- guidelines for teaching language (Chapter 3)
- basic communication skills (Chapter 4)
- finding out what your child can hear (Chapter 5)
- listening skills (Chapter 6)
- choosing and learning a language (Chapter 7)
- learning a sign language (Chapter 8)
- learning a spoken language (Chapter 9)

