Newborns to 3-month-olds may
- tell one person’s voice from another’s,
- tell speech from other sounds, and
- begin to remember things.

Talking: Talk to your baby a lot. Look her in the eye. Enjoy her responses: a waving arm, a smile, kicking legs, and so on. Engage her with language (“What a strong arm!” “Thanks for that sweet smile!”).

Reading: Your baby may have favorite books already! Create his own library on a shelf or in a stack near his crib. He’ll soon know that those books are his special things.

Singing: Celebrate the new sounds your baby is making. Echo them and even make up a little song or chant using just those sounds. You can babble back and forth!

3- to 6-month-olds may
- copy sounds and movements,
- turn toward a parent or caregiver’s voice, and
- make their own sounds.

Talking: Even feeding a newborn is a conversation. Your baby fusses or cries and you offer him milk—the beginning of communication! Babbles and coos are his language as he strengthens his speech muscles and experiments with sound.

Reading: It’s never too early to read to your child. As part of her bedtime routine, read her a book or two. Soon your baby will associate certain stories with falling asleep.

Singing: Use your body as an instrument: Clap, snap, whistle, and snort! Hearing different kinds of sounds helps your child build listening skills. It also engages his attention.
6- to 9-month-olds may
- copy or say the same sounds over and over, and say mama and dada,
- know the names of people and things, and
- clap and use their bodies to speak with others.

Talking: Fill everyday routines with talk. Build vocabulary by telling your child what you’re doing (“One sock...two socks. Now we can put on your shoes. One shoe...two shoes.”).

Reading: Point out signs around you (“Let’s buy some apples. See the sign? It says ‘apples.’”). This teaches that print has a purpose and words are everywhere, not just in books.

Singing: Babies enjoy wordplay as they form a sense of humor. Use your baby’s name in a rhyming chant or song (“Silly Lily, Silly Lily, Silly Lily.”).

9- to 12-month-olds may
- communicate by babbling or pointing,
- understand more words and commands, and
- respond to their own name and connect the names of others.

Talking: Lovingly acknowledge your baby’s “nonsense” words, such as ba ba or ma ma, by repeating them or extending the idea (“Yes, ba, ba. Baa, baa black sheep!” “Mama’s right here! Peek-a-boo!”).

Reading: On your desktop or smartphone, make a “Who Loves Baby?” slide show of photos of family and friends. Talk about each photo (“Who loves Alex? Uncle Jorge loves Alex.”).

Singing: Let your baby make some noise! Give her a wooden spoon and a plastic container. She’ll love making simple rhythms.
12- to 18-month-olds may
- enjoy touching, grabbing, squishing, and tasting just about everything,
- say more names of familiar people or objects, and
- rely more on memory for words or songs.

Talking: Your toddler may be very interested in your cell phone. Give her a toy phone to play with and to copy your “conversation” style.

Reading: Read street signs while you drive around or take a neighborhood walk (“Look at the big, red stop sign. S-T-O-P spells stop.”).

Singing: Sing the alphabet song with your child until he can sing it by himself. Praise your child for trying and succeeding.

18- to 24-month-olds may
- be able to act more on their own,
- use simple two- and three-word sentences and start asking questions, and
- learn new words quickly while understanding a lot more than they can say.

Talking: Close your eyes and explore with your ears! Say, “Let’s listen carefully. What do you hear?” Take turns naming the sounds around you (cars moving, doors closing, people talking).

Reading: Let your child hold anything that can be read: menus in a restaurant, the mail as you bring it from the mailbox. Point to words and read them aloud.

Singing: As you sing your child’s favorite songs, substitute new words for familiar ones (“Row, row, row your stroller, gently down the street…”).
2-year-olds may
- use sentences of two to four words,
- point to things or pictures when they are named, and
- repeat your words and phrases.

Talking: Notice sounds around the neighborhood. Talk with your child about who or what might be making them.

Reading: Help your child start to recognize letters in the alphabet. Point them out when you see them (“Look, there’s the letter A. A is for apple!”).

Singing: Make up songs while you wait in line or run errands. Try putting new words to a familiar song or create a chant (“Waiting, waiting for the bus, come on, bus and pick us up!” or “Going, going to the store to buy carrots. We need more.”).

3-year-olds may
- carry on conversations using two to three sentences,
- complete a sentence or rhyme in a favorite story, and
- know by sight the first letter of their name.

Talking: Even writing an e-mail can be a conversation starter! Talk to your child about whom she would like to send a message to and what she would say.

Reading: Together, make a storybook of your child’s drawings (just staple them together and have your child draw a cover). Then have him “read” you the book.

Singing: If your child is in childcare, she is likely learning new songs there. Have her teach you a song she knows!