INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

Encouraging Early Communication & Sound Development 1
Introduction
As parents you play an essential role in encouraging your child’s speech and language development. The following activities are designed to help you encourage your child’s early communication skills and to help them to experiment with sounds.

Do remember not to expect your baby to copy your sounds to start with, they will be listening, watching and learning.

Eye contact
Good eye contact is important for communication. It helps your child understand what is happening around them. Here are some ideas to help develop eye contact:

- **Using a squeaky toy** can be useful for developing this skill – hold a squeaky toy near your face and press it to make a noise. Whilst you are doing this encourage your child to look at you. When they do, give your child lots of positive reinforcement, e.g. smile and talk to them. You could say things like, ‘Well done, you’re looking at mummy!’ You can repeat this activity as often as you like.

- **Playing ‘Peek-a-Boo’** – this is a game that nearly all children enjoy. You can play it by covering your face with your hands or with a scarf and then slowly revealing your face with lots of smiles. You can also say things like ‘Boo!’ or ‘Here I am!’ Sometimes you can really grab your child’s attention and interest by varying the pitch and volume of your voice.

Attention
Paying attention to what is going on around them helps children to begin to understand language. Here are some games you can play to help develop your child’s attention skills:
• **Bubbles** - some children are fascinated by watching adults blow bubbles from a bubble wand. You can probably buy these from your local shop or supermarket. Encourage your child to watch you blowing the bubbles, and then pop them together. You could say things like ‘Pop,’ ‘Bubbles gone’, and ‘All gone!’ You could repeat this as often as you want, saying things like ‘Shall we do that again?’ or ‘Lets do some more!’

• **Hiding games** – take a toy which is of interest to your child, e.g. a favourite teddy. Make the toy disappear behind your back or into a bag or box. Encourage your child to reach for the toy and feel it, and then slowly make it re-appear. Name the toy and play with it. As your child gets more used to this game you can encourage them to find the toy themselves, and when they are successful, make a big fuss of them.

• **Toy bricks** - you can play lots of games with toy bricks that will help to develop your child’s attention. For example, you could build towers or walls with them and then knock them down, you can line them up and push them along the table like a train, and you can use them to make a noise by banging them together.

• **Books** - children often enjoy looking at simple picture books, especially those that they can become involved with, e.g. lift-the-flap books.

• **Nursery rhymes** - some well-known nursery rhymes help to encourage children to listen. Even before children can understand the words of nursery rhymes and action songs they begin to listen for certain sounds and words to indicate that something is going to happen, e.g. ‘Ring-a-ring-o’roses’ – *they all fall down*, ‘Round and round the Garden’ – *tickle you under there*, Incey wincey spider etc.
Listening
As well as learning to talk, children have to learn to listen. Children need to learn to recognise many different sounds and distinguish between them. Here are some games to play and things to do which will help your child to listen:

- We live in a very noisy world; we have to learn to listen to someone talking and to ignore all the other noises around them. How noisy is your house? Think about all the things which make listening more difficult, e.g. a washing machine, a television, a radio. Try to reduce these background noises as much as possible when playing and talking with your child e.g. when playing with your child, turn the television off.

- Try listening deliberately to the sounds around you at home; you may be surprised at how many different types of sounds you can hear, e.g. footsteps, taps running, doors slamming, birds singing, dogs barking, the lawnmower in the garden. When you and your child go for a walk point things out to look at and listen to, e.g. an aeroplane in the sky, the buses and cars passing by, the wind rustling the leaves.

- It is important that children have plenty of opportunities to play with toys which make different sounds. Toys such as rattles, bells, squeaky toys, drums and sound shakers are useful.

- To encourage your child to look for sounds, choose a noise-making object, e.g. drum, whistle, squeaky toy and when your child is not looking, make a noise and see if they respond. If your child turns to the sound give them the toy. Play with the toy together.

- Children will often listen better if you exaggerate your facial expressions. This is something that most adults do naturally. When talking to young children, you usually smile when they smile, and you probably pull
a face when they do too. It also helps if you have a surprise element to your voice by varying your pitch and loudness.

- As well as encouraging your child to listen it is important that you listen to what your child is saying, and respond. Have pretend conversations, take turns, and encourage your child to experiment with a range of sounds.

- **‘Ready Steady Go’** games are great for getting children to listen. ‘Ready… Steady…’ should be said with exaggerated, tone of voice. There should then be a short pause before you say an excited ‘Go!’ This will encourage your child to listen carefully for the word ‘Go’ because they will look forward to something happening at this time. Games in which you can use ‘Ready Steady Go’ include pushing cars down a ramp, knocking over a tower of bricks, blowing bubbles, and pop-up toys such as ‘Jack-in-a-Box’.

**Babbling and early sound development**

When your child is a few months old they will begin to experiment with making sounds. You can encourage this early sound development by:

- Having babble ‘conversations’ with your child. Start with strings of sounds the child is already using, e.g. ‘Mamama’, ‘Nanana’, ‘Wuwuwu’. Vary the vowels sounds (*ah, eh, eye, oh, oo*) and the pitch of your voice (*deep voice and high voice*). Certain speech sounds usually emerge before others, e.g. ‘w, m, p, b’. Use these sounds in your babble ‘conversations’ with your child.

- Put your face close to your child’s. You can encourage them to feel your face and their own when they are babbling.

- Children’s early sound play often goes together with active enjoyment or excitement. Even small children enjoy being bounced up and down on their parents’ knee. As you do this,
make your voice go higher when you say ‘Up’, and lower when you say ‘Down!’

- At around 5 to 6 months of age your child will start to babble with different sounds. When this starts to develop some children born with a cleft of the palate will use the backs of their tongues to make sounds rather than the fronts of their tongues and their lips. Sometimes sounds will be made in the throat rather than the mouth. It is important to encourage the use of mouth and lip sounds (w, p, b, t, d, sh) and discourage the use of any throat or ‘growly’ sounds. If your child does make ‘growly’ sounds simply take your turn in the babble conversation by using mouth and lip sounds.

- Your child will probably start to copy your sounds from about 8 months of age. Songs will help to encourage this. Sing simple songs that have a well-known melody. You can adapt these songs to include babble sounds, e.g. the wheels on the bus go ‘bbb bbb’, the babies on the bus go ‘wa wa wa’, the mummies on the bus go ‘sh sh sh’ etc.

**If you have any questions you would like to ask us please do not hesitate to contact any one of the Speech and Language Therapists in the Regional Cleft Service at:**

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Compliments & Complaints

We would welcome any feedback on our service, which could be given directly to your Specialist Speech and Language Therapist or to our Speech and Language Therapy Manager. Alternatively, problems can be raised with a member of PALS.

Pals aims to give advice and assistance to sort out your problems as quickly as possible. The service is led by matrons and managers. To contact PALS ask a member of staff or ring the general PALS number on 0113 206 7168 and we will arrange for a matron or the relevant manager to speak to you.

If you remain unhappy, you can contact the Patient Relations department to make a formal complaint. Telephone: 0113 206 6261.