

# Suggestions for Enhancing Feeding Skills

*These suggestions follow a developmental framework, however, one does not need to be achieved before moving on to the next.*

1. Bring babies' hands to their mouth. Allow them to explore their own hands. Provide opportunities to enhance oral development by offering a variety of objects to mouth. These items may include teething rings, cloth toys, baby's own toes, feeding utensils, etc.
2. Be aware of baby's communicative signals during feeding. Babies will communicate the need to "take a break," "want more," "stop eating," etc. in their own individual ways using a variety of gestures, eye gaze and vocalizations. Being alert to these signals and responding to them is aiding in the development of communication.
3. Introduce your child to a cup by six months of age. Cups with lids that have holes are preferable to cups with lids that have a spout as baby may tend to bite on the spout. Watching for your child to move away from biting the cup rim to drinking with their lower lip firmly on the cup rim is an important developmental step. Be sure that your child is not using the tongue to stabilize the cup. Encourage use of the lower lip for stability during drinking.
4. When cup drinking, baby should be attempting to sequence 3-4 sip/swallows without pausing for a breath.  
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  1. Encourage upper lip closure on the spoon during feeding by offering food on a flat bowled spoon and waiting for the lip to come down to the spoon. Resist the urge to scrape the spoon off the gum ridge.
  2. Encourage a variety of textures in solid foods. Move from smooth to lumpy to soft solids to firmer solids/table food.
  3. Offer opportunities for finger feeding. Allowing baby to play with food is a good way to encourage exploring food textures and tastes and to participate in the social aspect of eating.
  4. Encourage biting of solid foods to improve jaw strength. Hold the solid while baby bites through the food rather than allowing him/her to break off the food with his hand while holding with his teeth.
  5. Play oral games to help baby's tongue to move in his mouth. For example, hide food in the side of his mouth and play "find the food." Have baby imitate your oral movements – sticking out your tongue, pursing lips, smiling.

# **Suggestions for Enhancing Language Development**

*These suggestions follow a developmental framework, however, one does not need to be achieved before moving on to the next.*

1. Talk about activities with your infant as you are doing them. Label objects and actions as you bathe, feed, dress and play with your baby.
2. Imitate the sounds your baby produces. Try to engage baby in a back and forth "conversation" using sounds he produces as well as new sounds.
3. Record your baby's sounds on tape and play them back to encourage him to continue to vocalize. There are several toys on the market that will do this as well as several infant tape recorders available.
4. Provide a lot of face-to-face conversation to your baby encouraging eye contact as often as is comfortable. Take cues, from your baby. If he turns away, stop for awhile and then try again.
5. Babies will often vocalize during feeding making mealtime a good opportunity for socialization.
6. Begin reading to your baby as early as possible. Prop baby in your lap and read nursery rhymes using slightly exaggerated inflection.
7. Expose your baby to music, both your own singing and music on tape.
8. Use sound production when you are playing movement games with your baby. Add sound effects to the gestures.
9. Introduce the use of total communication speech/sign/pictures as soon as you are comfortable doing so. Input to both the visual (sign, pictures) and auditory (speech) pathways will increase your child's ability to comprehend and use language.

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1. Play games with your child to encourage initiation, turn taking and early social language. Games such as peek-a-boo, so big, and pat-a-cake work well.
2. Read picture books to your child, point to and identify the items pictured. Children at this age particularly enjoy pictures of other babies performing everyday tasks.

3. Play "Where is it?" Teach your child to point to common objects, people, and favorite toys.

4. Incorporate gestures and verbal intonation into everyday language such as "uh oh," "all done," "want more," "bye bye," and "blow a kiss."

5. Bath time, pool time, and other types of water play are good activities to encourage sound production. Use a variety of words to describe the activity – pouring, washing, splashing, ear, nose, tummy.

6 Puppets can be used to aid language development. Children will often interact with and verbalize to puppets more readily than adults!

7 Use a box of common objects (cup, ball, car, phone, brush etc.) to play games such as: name it, find it, or just to fill and dump.

8. Introduce music/gesture games such as This Little Piggy, Wheels on the Bus, This is the Way We Wash Our Face, etc.

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1. Continue to encourage picture naming in books, magazines, etc. Look for pictures of actions as well as things.

2. Make a paper, cloth or cardboard "personalized" book with items/pictures from your child's everyday life. Use common items as well as your child's particular favorite things. Go through the book with your child having him name the items and talk about what to do with them and where to find them. Do the same for familiar people in your child's life and favorite activities or places to go.

3. Encourage your child to distinguish parts from the whole object such as the wheels on the car or tail on the dog.

4. Focus on recognition of body parts on your child, dolls and others.

5. Encourage your child to use and understand pronouns such as me, mine, you, I and to use his first name.

6. As soon as your child has a few consistent words/signs/word approximations, model and encourage two word combinations such as "Daddy go" and "Roll ball."

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1. Design activities that encourage the use of language to label and describe such as baking cookies, making jello, block play, play dough, etc. Allow your child to be an

active participant. Verbalize your actions. This provides your child with an opportunity to learn new words and grammatical structures in context.

2. Continue to read books to your child. Encourage your child to read along by completing sentences in familiar stories. Repetitive line books work well for this.

3. Have your child "draw" a picture of a recent event and tell you about his drawing. Encourage use of "first, then" language.

4. Talk about objects by function "What do you drink from?" , "What do you comb your hair with, What do you put on your feet?"

5. Incorporate spatial concepts such as "in, on, under, in front, behind" into play activities. Let your child use his body to explore these concepts as well objects.

6. Use pretend play (grocery store, house, dress up) to model 2-3 word phrases and conversational language. Re enact scenes from favorite movies taking turns being different characters.