

Oxford Craniofacial Unit

# **COMMUNICATING WITH A CHILD WITH FACIAL PALSY**

**Information for parents and carers**

Your child may have been born with facial palsy, or may have developed facial palsy after an accident, illness or an operation.

Some children with facial palsy are not able to move some or all of the muscles on their face. Facial palsy can affect one side of the face, both sides, or just one area of the face (e.g. the mouth).

## Communicating with your child

When children are babies they send messages to their parents called 'cues'. These cues may be turning their head away from the bottle or breast to let you know that they are finished feeding, or waving their arms or legs to show they are excited. Before children develop language, this is the first step in their communication development.

Your child might not be able to frown to show you that they feel grumpy, or smile to show you they feel happy, but just like other children they will start to use their body and sounds to let you know these messages. As you and your child get to know each other, you will learn about the messages your child is sending you, so you can respond to them.

## Communication development

All babies and young children develop and change rapidly, so your child's skills may change over time. Try to set aside time for one-to-one play for 10-15 minutes, at least once a week. This will allow you to really focus on what your child is able to do and give you a chance to spot any changes. It is also a great way to help bonding and to show positive attention to your baby.

This one-to-one play can really help you to 'tune in' to the cues they are giving. But make sure you do this at a time when your baby is happy, alert and not too tired. Keep sessions short, no baby can concentrate for very long, and watch out for cues that your baby has had enough (such as turning away, closing their eyes or grizzling).

One of the first steps when a baby is learning to communicate is copying. They often do this by copying movements that you make with your face (for example when you open your mouth or poke your tongue out). Children with facial palsy might be able to do some movements with their face (e.g. raise their eyebrows) but find other movements difficult (e.g. smiling).

Remember that your child can communicate with you in other ways. It is important to learn to read the messages that your child is giving you. During play with your child, spend some time learning about which movements they can do and use these to help encourage their copying.

## Speech sound development

When your child learns to use their voice, you can listen to the range of sounds that they make. Many children with facial palsy develop normal speech and language, but some children with facial palsy might find it difficult to use their lips to make sounds like 'p', 'b', 'm', 'f' and 'v'.

Your child's Speech and Language Therapist and Facial Therapist can support them with ideas to help their speech development.

## Body language

When we communicate we send a lot of messages with our faces and bodies to provide extra information alongside what we say. We can frown to show we are annoyed and raise our eyebrows to show we are surprised. This can be harder for children with facial palsy, as they can't always make all of these movements.

As your child grows up, talk with them about using their whole body to communicate. They can show they are friendly and would like to play with other children both by what they say but also with their body language.

When your child is learning to communicate, they may use facial expression less than other children. An important area to encourage in a child with facial palsy is their use of body language to communicate. You can talk with your child about using their whole body to communicate. For example, when they are feeling happy, you could talk to them about how they showed they were happy using their whole body (e.g. using their hands, posture etc.).

## Activity ideas

Babies love songs that have lots of actions. They encourage your child to join in and copy movements with their body. Think of simple actions that you and your baby can do while you sing the song. You can rock your baby in your arms or move their hands and legs. For example:

Sing: If you're happy and you know it clap your hands (*bring baby's hands gently together in a clap*)

If you're happy and you know it clap your hands (*bring baby's hands gently together in a clap*)

If you're happy and you know it, (*move baby's arms up and down*)

And you're really want to show it (*move baby's arms up and down*)

If you're happy and you know it clap your hands (*bring baby's hands gently together in a clap*)

## Songs to sing

- Pat-a-cake
- The Wheels on the Bus
- Mary Had a Little Lamb
- If You're Happy and You Know it
- Ring-a-Ring a Rosie
- Old McDonald Had a Farm
- Where is Thumbkin?
- Twinkle Twinkle Little Star
- Hockey Cokey
- This Old Man, He Played One
- Miss Polly Had a Dolly
- It's Raining, It's Pouring
- Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes
- Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear

### ***If You're Happy and You Know It***

*If you're happy and you know it  
clap your hands*

*If you're happy and you know it  
clap your hands*

*If you're happy and you know it,  
And you really want to show it*

*If you're happy and you know it  
clap your hands.*

### ***Three Fat Sausages***

*Three fat sausages sizzling in a  
pan.*

*Sizzle sizzle sizzle and one  
went...*

*Bang*

*Two fat sausages sizzling...*

### ***Round and Round The Garden***

*Round and round the garden*

*Like a teddy bear.*

*One step... Two step...*

*Tickle you under there*

### ***Little Peter Rabbit***

*Little Peter Rabbit had a fly upon  
his nose*

*Little Peter Rabbit had a fly upon  
his nose.*

*Little Peter Rabbit had a fly upon  
his nose*

*So he swished and swashed it*

*Until the fly flew away*

### **Three Little Monkeys**

*Three little monkeys jumping on  
the bed*

*One fell off and bumped his head*

*Mummy called the doctor*

*And the doctor said*

*No more monkeys jumping on  
the bed.*

*Two little monkeys...*

### **Incy Wincy Spider**

*Incy Wincy spider climbed up the  
water spout.*

*Down came the rain and washed  
poor Incy out.*

*Out came the sunshine and dried  
up all the rain.*

*So Incy Wincy spider climbed up  
the spout again.*

### **Five Little Ducks**

*Five little ducks went out to play*

*Over the hill and far away*

*Mother duck said 'quack quack  
quack quack'*

*But only four little ducks came  
back.*

*Four little ducks...*

### **Row Row Row Your Boat**

*Row row row your boat*

*Gently down the stream*

*Merrily merrily merrily merrily*

*Life is such a dream*

### **There Were Three In the Bed**

*There were three in the bed*

*And the little one said*

*Roll over roll over*

*So they all rolled over*

*And one fell out*

*There were two in the bed...*

### **Open Shut Them**

*Open shut them, open shut them*

*Give a little clap*

*Open shut them, open shut them*

*Lay them in your lap*

## Further advice

If you have any concerns or questions about your child's communication development, please speak to their Speech and Language Therapist.



If you have a specific requirement, need an interpreter, a document in Easy Read, another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221 473** or email **PALS@ouh.nhs.uk**

Author: Sarah Kilcoyne, Principal Specialist Speech and Language Therapist  
August 2018  
Review: August 2021  
Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust  
Oxford OX3 9DU  
[www.ouh.nhs.uk/information](http://www.ouh.nhs.uk/information)

