May is Speech and Hearing month so our first two articles feature tips to help develop language skills and identify possible problems early.

Our third article explores another important sense - vision. We discuss how vision develops over time and when you should talk to your health-care provider about your child's vision.

Lastly, strong relationships between young children and caregivers promote positive mental health and that improves development in areas like speech and language - it's all connected. To learn more about how to boost your connection check out article four.

**MAY 2015**

**TALKING WITH HANDS**

**IDENTIFYING HEARING LOSS**

**I SEE YOU - BABIES AND VISION**

**BOOST YOUR CONNECTION**

**SOURCES AND WHERE TO GO FOR MORE INFO**

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**TALKING WITH HANDS - THE POWER OF GESTURES**

You know that feeling when a word or a name is on the tip of your tongue and it just won't come out? You find yourself saying "you know, the, the, the..." and then you move your arm or hand and the word finally pops out. It turns out that gestures not only help us remember something in the moment but they also help us learn to communicate.

Gestures are an important part of communication for both adults and children. In fact, most babies start communicating through gesture at about nine months of age. The development of gestures from age nine to 16 months predicts language abilities two years later.

Are you wondering if your toddler is on track? An important rule of thumb is that by 16 months of age children should use at least 16 gestures.

Here are a couple ways you can use gestures to boost language skills.

- When teaching your toddler or pre-schooler a new word, try adding a gesture to make it easier for them to remember.
- If you are giving your school-age child instructions about chores, include a gesture with each instruction.

For more information on using gestures check out this [article](#).
IDENTIFYING HEARING LOSS

Speech and hearing go hand in hand. Your child learns to speak by listening to others; this learning begins at birth. About 10 per cent of children experience some form of hearing loss. Hearing loss can be either temporary or long term.

Temporary hearing loss can be caused by things like ear infections, middle ear fluid or ear wax. Parents can take steps to prevent temporary hearing loss by promoting healthy habits like hand washing to help prevent the spread of germs that can cause ear infections. You can also protect your child's hearing by not exposing them to excessive loud noises.

Hearing loss can be difficult to detect in young children. Knowing how speech, language and hearing typically develop at different ages can help alert you to potential problems. Check out HealthLink BC’s article - What are the speech and language milestones for my child's age group? for details.

Help is available for both temporary and permanent hearing loss. If you have concerns about your child's hearing, contact your local health centre to speak with a public health nurse or audiologist.

For more information on children's hearing check out: Interior Health's website and HealthLinkBC.

I SEE YOU ... BABIES AND VISION

Babies are born with some ability to see. They can see the difference between light and dark, notice shapes and patterns, and focus on some objects for short periods of time. As children grow, they learn to use both their eyes together to help focus, track objects, and learn hand-eye coordination. It is not uncommon for an infant's eyes to sometimes wander separately or to cross. This is normal in the first three months as they learn to use their eyes together. If this happens often, you should talk to your health-care provider.

When should I be concerned?
Children with a family history of lazy or crossed eyes are at a higher risk of having eye problems. If you have a history of these vision problems in your family, have your child's eyes examined by an eye doctor (optometrist or ophthalmologist) by three years of age or earlier.

If you notice any of these signs or symptoms in your child, talk to your health-care provider or eye doctor:

- Red, itchy, or watery eyes
- Squinting or rubbing eyes
- Excessive blinking
- Drooping upper eyelid
- Covering / closing one eye
- Sensitivity to light
- Lack of concentration
- Holds objects too close
- Avoids activities needing distance vision
- Avoids books and television
- Bumps into things
It’s important children have their first eye exam between six and nine months. Your child can have a vision test or eye exam even if he/she does not talk or read yet. They should have at least one eye exam between the ages of two and five and then yearly after starting school. For information on vision screening in your area, contact your local health centre.

For more information on children and vision:
Young children and their vision
Your child’s eye health

BOOST YOUR CONNECTION

These days the word “connection” is often associated with computers, tablets and other electronic gadgets. However, there is more to connection than the strength of your WiFi signal. Social and emotional connections are an essential part of good mental health for adults and children.

Mental health for children under age three is about their growing ability to have positive relationships and to experience, express and manage feelings. All children, even babies, need a healthy caring relationship with an adult who can comfort them when feeling upset, ill, hurt or lonely.

The relationship you have with your child can help promote positive mental health now and in the future. Practice these five tips to make sure your connection is a strong one.

Spend real face time with your baby. Cuddle, play and hold your baby close. Face-to-face contact and a gentle loving touch will help your baby connect with you and grow in healthy ways.

Observe and interact with your baby. Respond to your baby’s facial expressions and sounds; try imitating them. Watch and listen to your baby to learn what your baby wants or needs.

Respond when baby is upset. You cannot spoil a baby with too much attention. Research shows that babies whose parents respond promptly when they are upset, actually cry less after the first year.

Explore and share with your baby. Help your baby explore and play by finding ways to share new things. Stacking cups or playing with blocks or stuffed toys are all more fun when done together.

Get down with your baby. Every baby needs “tummy time” on a mat or blanket set on the floor. This is a time when your baby will exercise muscles or discover new ways to move. Get down on the floor, watch what your baby does and respond.

Want to learn more? Check out HealthyFamilies BC’s parenting section.

Sources and where to get more info
Interior Health - Search for Health Centres under “location type”
Interior Health
HealthLinkBC
HealthyFamilies BC
This e-newsletter is an Interior Health project to provide quick and easy health tips for new parents and caregivers of children ages 0 to 2 years. Your comments and topic suggestions are welcome! Simply email us at: healthmatters@interiorhealth.ca.

For more info or to attend a free child health clinic, contact your local Public Health Centre. You can find contact info online at: www.interiorhealth.ca or look it up under Interior Health in the blue pages of your local phone book.

Sincerely,
Interior Health Authority