



Your Child and **Hydrocephalus**

Section three **1–2 years**

1–2 years

Communication

This can be a tricky time for many parents; your baby starts to get a sense of himself as a whole ‘little person’, separate from you. He’ll start to know what he wants and what he doesn’t want, but won’t have the language to communicate it. This is where the work you did really getting to know your child, and recognising and meeting his needs, pays off. Begin to help your child with the language of emotions, such as, “You look happy” and “I think you’re feeling angry”.



Your baby will understand many more words than they can say. They will begin to understand, “No,” but won’t be developed enough to stop themselves doing whatever it is you’re saying “No” to. This isn’t naughtiness, it is just the stage of development. Using positive language that tells him what you want him to do can be helpful. For example, “Put your hands on the table,” might work better than, “Stop hitting your brother” – it’s easier to understand. Model the language and behaviour you want to see, never forget what copycats small children are! Use lots of praise for the behaviour you want to see, and you’ll see more of it! Descriptive praise helps a child to understand what they are doing well, such as, “I am pleased that you are playing quietly with your brother”.

It can be helpful to incorporate some basic signs into your conversations – this gives your baby a way to communicate clearly with his hands before he masters the words and can help to decrease frustration. Some baby classes teach baby sign and if you see any therapists they may be able to help you find out where you can learn some form of sign language like Makaton, for example.



Cognition and Learning

What you can do: You can help by providing lots of opportunities - peek-a-boo games and cause-and-effect toys, like pop-up toys, are ideal. Talk through picture books, for example, “Benny Bear Stepped into the Shower”, then ask them what they think will happen next – “He got wet,” or “He had a wash,” etc.

To encourage initiation, give your child two or three activities or toys to choose from and allow them to pick. Try to be specific: “Would you rather play with playdough, or do colouring?”

If they are still struggling, reduce the choice to two different toys or activities.



IMPORTANT TO KNOW... Sometimes children with hydrocephalus need encouraging to explore and learn. They may happily watch what is going on rather than engage with an activity. The ability to learn to anticipate something happening, for example a that bubble will pop when it’s touched, needs to be learnt. It’s an important life skill.

1–2 years

Social and emotional development

During this time, your baby will begin to decide what she wants, but won't be developed enough to understand your reasons for why she can't have her way. She'll play alongside other children rather than with them, and not understand about sharing.

Children of this age have no idea of time and can get anxious if they can't see you — they don't know how long you've been gone, and don't know yet that you'll be back for sure!



Physical and sensory development

Language can be used to teach movement and vice versa, and that language and movement enhance each other. Songs with actions or movements are great.

Look out for parent and baby groups near you as they provide good opportunities for development, and for you to get out of the house!

12–18 months

Skills to look out for

- Takes steps alone
- Walks a distance with one hand held
- Gets up to standing, from the floor, without help
- Walks holding/pushing a large toy on wheels, e.g. a truck. The toy should be well weighted so that it does not tip up
- Walks independently with legs wide apart. The wide walking base will gradually decrease
- Climbs on and off furniture
- Maintains standing balance while playing games, without falling over
- Eats with fingers
- Turns the pages of a board book
- Drinks from a cup independently

Ways to play

Talk to your child about her body parts, e.g. mouth, hands and feet. Children with spina bifida often have some loss of sensation so talking about different parts of their body, especially their legs, may not mean anything to them.

Encourage your child to identify body parts on a teddy or doll, themselves and in pictures

- Ask your child to follow simple instructions, e.g. "Please fetch the train," or "Please go to the table"
- Ask them to go and get a familiar object from another room, e.g. potty, cup, favourite toy





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19–24 months

More complex skills emerge and a child begins to take an interest in the outside world.

Help your child to

- Climb up and down stairs on hands and knees, then by holding the handrail. This requires looking down, judging depth and coping with patterned carpet. Children who are not walking could experience this by going up and down stairs on their bottoms
- Use furniture to climb for a toy
- Look out of the window. Non-ambulant (not standing or walking) children could be placed at a low window or knelt on the sofa to see out
- Start to run
- Start to kick a ball – you can teach your child to do this from sitting on a chair if standing balance is not complete
- Experiment with jumping – hands may need to be held to begin with to get the idea of moving up and down. Rebound (trampoline) therapy is a great way to teach this
- Throw a ball – different sizes, weights and colours of balls can be used to widen the sensory experience. This can be done from a sitting position as well as standing
- Negotiate around objects whatever form of mobility they are using
- Run and stop on time

Ways to play

- Talk to your child
- Look at simple pictures and show ‘running’ and ‘jumping’
- Teach simple songs and let them sing and dance to music. A wheelchair or mobile seat or a Scoot can be of help for children who are unable to walk, so they can move to music

Bridging the gaps

Once she reaches the end of the sofa, your baby will need to start figuring out how to cross the gap to another piece of furniture.

You can help encourage her by placing a toy or something else they want. Initially she may just reach for the toy, but eventually will step over. Create circuits in the room by moving furniture slightly closer together for your little one to practise on.

Walking and independent mobility

If your child is physically unable to move around on their own then consider alternatives. Independent movement is so important for children to develop memory training, navigating and decision-making. In a child with spina bifida who may have difficulty with weight bearing through the legs your physiotherapist will be able to advise on options of walkers that can give more support, or possibly even a little chair or seat that can be manoeuvred, either by your child wheeling it with her arms or using a power supply (like an electric power wheelchair).

Our aim is that your child has independent mobility from around 18 months, just like their friends. If you have concerns about your child’s mobility, speak to your physiotherapist.



If your child is unable to crawl or pull themselves up to stand by 12 months, please make sure that you get some support from your physiotherapist or OT to decide on the best way to help. Remember to avoid baby walkers and equipment unless specifically advised to use these by a physiotherapist or occupational therapist.



AWESOME SKILL: CRUISING

This is when little ones move around by stepping side to side and holding on to furniture. It's really important for learning how to shift weight so that they can take a step.

You can encourage cruising by making sure that your child has lots of opportunity to cruise. Move pieces of safe furniture closer together and place toys to one side that your baby has to reach and move to get them. If your baby needs help getting started, place your hands on his hips. Gently shift him over to one side so that all his weight is on one leg. Then slightly push him to the side of the leg that he needs to lift to step out. Your physiotherapist can help you with this if you get stuck.

Once your little one is cruising and confidently standing, he may be ready to start walking while pushing a walker or wheeled toy. These first steps are very unsteady with wide legs. Make sure the push-along toy/walker is sturdy and not easily tipped over!

