



Episode 7: Talking
with Joanne Bottin from Karitane

Talking

We discuss developmental milestones in relation to your baby starting to talk, how to encourage it and what signs to look out for!

Tiffany: Hi everyone, today we welcome Joanne Bottin, who is a child and family health educator at Karitane to our podcast. Today we'll be discussing an important and exciting milestone for a little one, talking. Hi, Joanne. Thank you for joining us.

Joanne: Hi, thanks for having me. It's lovely to be here.

Tiffany: Well, it's lovely to have you, so I guess the first typical question is going to be, when do babies start talking, Joy? And is there an age that's specific to when they first start to sort of form those words because I think that's something that everyone likes to know. It's such an exciting time to have your little ones start to talk.

Joanne: Of course it is really exciting. It's one of those milestones that parents really look forward to. And I guess one of the things for parents to be mindful of or be aware of is that actually the part of the communication development phase actually starts during pregnancy. So it's always a really lovely idea to start to talk to your tummy or have other people, other family members start to talk to the tummy and talk to baby in the tummy and they start to become familiar with the sounds and the pitch and tone of different family members that they're going to be around. And this starts to build those communication pathways in the brain and starts to really build that foundation for talking as after they're born. Yeah. So doing that as early on as possible, and it gets you into the habit as a parent, I guess of talking to your baby, and that can be a difficult thing to do if you are not naturally a big talker. So it's a good practice period for you to start that communication process.

Tiffany: Yeah, for sure.

Joanne: So after the baby's born, they will start to make some small sounds and to start to mimic some of the noises and the sounds and the facial expressions that they see and hear from a parent or from other family members in the home and they'll do that fairly quickly.

Episode 7: Talking
with Joanne Bottin from Karitane

Joanne: (cont...) So usually by the age of about six weeks, you'll already start to notice that they'll be making those "Ooh" and "Aah" and little coos sort of sounds that baby's make that are really cute and we love to hear. And certainly one of the big things is crying and that's sort of the little whimpering crying noises that babies can make is the really early foundation of that communication. When they can't use words and formulate the things that they want to say just yet, crying is their really first form of communication to let somebody know that they want or need something from them.

It's really helpful for parents to acknowledge that when the baby is crying to even talk to them about that, "Oh, I can see that you need me. What is happening for you right now? Are you hungry? Are you tired? What's happening? I can see that you're trying to let me know something's happening for you." So to really start to talk and to respond to those early forms of communication, even though they're not clear and we don't know exactly what it is that they're trying to say, they are trying to say something. So really acknowledging that and starting to participate in that to and fro kind of communication skill.

I guess one of the other things to think about is that it's really easy to get caught up as a parent sometimes with our phones and our iPads and touching base with everybody on social media. So trying to remember to put our phones down and really spend some time and talking and engaging with our children from really early on, from those really early days after they're born. So during feeding times is a really good time to sit and to really make some really lovely eye contact and to start to really engage in and form a nice attachment and we do that by really being present in the environment and talking and letting them know what we're doing.

One of the things I say with parents, sometimes you can kind of act like the commentator for what's happening throughout the day. So just sort of talk and explain all the little things that you're doing. "I'm just going to go and get a drink now. I'm just going to pick you up and let's go and change your nappy," or, "Let's go and put your rep on and get you ready for bed," and, "Oh, I can see that you're upset. Let's have a carol," and we can start to just really commentate the things that you're doing and you see that you said that your baby's doing or trying to do really helps to start to build those communication skills and those pathways in the brain in babies as part of that foundation for talking.

Episode 7: Talking
with Joanne Bottin from Karitane

Tiffany: That's so fabulous to know. And I think it brings lots of memories for me with my little ones, my teenagers now, but just thinking about just the little things that I used to do, but I think the commentary is lovely and I do remember having those little conversations with them and just thinking about explaining what you're doing and really I think sometimes too, it can be lonely as a parent being at home, particularly with just you and the babies. So having a chat with them or talking to them, at least it's someone to talk to.

Joanne: Definitely, you're right. It really is. Sometimes parenting can be a bit of a lonely time when babies are little and they don't really talk and say so much and sometimes we're home on our own with them, so it can get lonely. So really we don't want to go a whole day without really talking and saying much so kind of trying to get into that habit of just like I say, really commentating your day and commentating your baby's day, it really helps them to sort of hear you, get used to the different pictures and tones in your voice. It's also really important to use some facial expressions when you're talking. So when you see that your baby's crying, you might make the little frown face and change the tone of your voice. That lets them know that, "I can see that you're sad," that you kind of have that empathy and understanding about what's happening for them. And that sort of also builds that cross section around understanding emotions and communicating emotions and how we feel, not just the words that we say, but the actions and the behaviours that we have.

So a big part of communication is not just words, but also very much pitch in our tone and our body language and facial expressions to make sure that we're using all of those skills.

Tiffany: Absolutely. So, Jo, can you take us through some of the most common developmental milestones from birth to three years when your baby comes into talking and how those sort of milestones come about.

Joanne: Ooh-ing and aah-ing and coos are really our first sort of starting of talking for our babies and that really starts from around about six weeks of age. And certainly the crying and the whimpering sounds that you will hear start straight away. So that's sort of the first indication of language and communication development.

Episode 7: Talking
with Joanne Bottin from Karitane

Joanne: (cont...) By the time our babies get to around six months of age, we start to hear those laughing sounds. And that's always a really exciting time for parents. And so we can see that our baby's reacting to us and laughing and finding humour and enjoying things that they're seeing and doing.

Around that same time, around that six month mark, you'll also see that babies start to copy some of the sounds that they're hearing from the people around them. So it might be a little coughing and a little sneezing and any sort of hiccupy sort of sounds, little things that they're hearing regularly or that they find easy and common to mimic. They will try and do that around that sort of five to six month mark. So again, they won't have the clarity of words specifically, but they're practicing the sounds that they will use for their language by making those little mimicking sounds and copying what they're hearing and saying. They also around that age start to practice the different pitches and tones in their voice. So then you'll start to hear a bit more variation in the way that the sounds are made and the things that they're doing. And that's all again that practice process for language for them.

By the time the babies get to around the nine to 12 month mark, we can start to hear actual words start to come into play. So things like mama and dad, baba are usually the most common first words that we hear from babies say. A lot of parents will consider their first words. And that's always again another really exciting time when you first get called mama or dad for the first time and somebody lovely. And that can happen between nine to 12 months. It's really important to remember as a parent though, that we say nine to 12 months. There's a bit of a window there. So every baby is a little bit different. So some babies might start around nine months, even maybe a fraction before that. Some babies might not do that until closer to the 11 month mark. And that's okay, just keep talking to our babies and giving them the opportunity to make sounds and practice their language skills.

By the time our babies get to 12 months of age, we're looking at communications styles that include more gross motor skills. So they might be starting to wave at people and they might be starting to point at things that they like or things that they see. And so that is forming part of that communication process.



Episode 7: Talking
with Joanne Bottin from Karitane

Joanne: (cont...) So when we see our babies do things like that, if they're pointing at something, our job as the commentator again, is to talk about that, "Oh, I can see that you're pointing over at the light or you're pointing at the dog." So we start to give words to the things that they're pointing out and saying. So that we're acknowledging that we can see what they're doing and they're trying to tell us something and we've been giving them some of the words to build onto those skills.

And you see, I guess, around that sort of 12 months to 18 month mark is in your start, because they're doing mamas and babas and the cooing and aahr-ing sounds, and they're also starting to babble a little bit more. So it all almost feels like we're having little conversations with our babies. We may not understand what they're saying, but again, it's a really important part of that language skill development. When they feel like they're practicing and they're having an opportunity to talk about or say the things they're seeing and hearing, our job as a parent is to really encourage that and acknowledge that we're hearing other than saying that I'm being involved in that conversation with them.

Tiffany: It's so nice to be able to kind of have, like you said, that commentary and that conversation starting I think, because like you said, it's that when they're pointing to things and when they're even looking at something, hopefully if it's repeated enough, for example like that's the dog or there's the cat, or I can see you're looking at the cat hopefully they'll pick up on those words and they'll really, if they hear it enough, they'll understand that that's what that is. So that's a great tip and it's a great thing to really think about, I guess when you do have a baby. It's not normal for you to necessarily be a commentator, you just use examples there. It's not normal to kind of do that. So I guess it's like training yourself to do those things, isn't it?

Joanne: Definitely. It's not comfortable for everybody. Not everybody's naturally a big talker or that's not something that we're all comfortable with. So it can feel a little bit awkward and a little bit uncomfortable, but certainly the more you repeat words and repeat phrases, that's how our children are going to learn what things are. So if we're saying every time, it's time to give them some food or a drink, if we're saying, "Okay, it's time for a drink now, would you like your drink now? Here's your drink." Then they're eventually going to go, "Oh, that's called a drink."

Episode 7: Talking
with Joanne Bottin from Karitane

Joanne: (cont...) So then they're going to use word when they want to and they might start to put their hand up and just say drink. So initially they're not going to be able to talk in sentences. It will be one word answers, but it will be those repetitious words that they've been hearing so drink.

Up is another one that kids will often say. "It's time to get up. Now let's get up off the floor, let's get up and do this now." So up is often one and kids part of the development will often put their hands up when they're wanting something or reaching for you. So when we see them do things like that, and we put the words to go, "Oh, you want to get up now?" So then our children will start to put their hands up and also use the word up to say this is what I want. So using those words repetitiously is absolutely a fantastic way to help them build their skills in language. There are words that are really common like drink and sleep and play and dog and cat, mum, dad and people's names like Nan and Pop or you might have a sibling, they might have another child at home, so using their name frequently. They're the words that are most commonly picked up on first of all with children, because they hear them frequently.

Tiffany: Absolutely! Makes sense.

Joanne: So it's a really good opportunity to commentate and to really be repetitious about the things that we're seeing and what we're doing. And they're the words that they kind of pick up on first. So I guess yeah, by about 18 months of age, now, we're getting to the age that you would expect that they're starting to build a bit of a vocabulary, a bit of a basket full of words. So around about 18 months, you would expect that they might have a vocabulary of about up to about 10 words. And it will be those more frequent words like we were talking about.

And around the age of two, and again, this is a little bit different for everybody, but around the age of two, we will start to see children put some of those words together. So they might say things like, "Up mum or drink mum or drink dad, daddy up." So they'll start to form those first little sentences by using those frequent words and joining them together. They won't have all the joining words in between yet, they'll just know to put together the words that they know and our job as a parent then when they're using those things, starting to build those little two word sentences is to help to build on those. "You want to come up to mummy now."

Episode 7: Talking
with Joanne Bottin from Karitane

Joanne: (cont...) So we start to add on those little words in between that will help to build those vocabulary and to build those bigger sentences for them.

It's really important I guess to in those times, is if children make a mistake, when they point to something and they call it the wrong name, or they say up instead of down or something like that, that we don't say, "No, that's not right," because we don't want to upset their confidence and sort of make them feel like they can't do it or they're not very good at it because we want to help build that self esteem and that confidence in their language development. So we might just repeat what they've said, but with the correct thing. "So you want to get up now," instead of if they say down and they meant to say up. "You want to get up now. You want to go and do this now," or whatever it might be. So we are correct. We say what it is that we think they're trying to tell us with the correct words instead without saying actually that was wrong.

Tiffany: Yeah, no one wants to hear that.

Joanne: You want to really be careful about building their self-esteem and that confidence and just to continue to help them. They're still in a really learning phase of that language development. So it is a critical time to keep them feeling confident and to really keep working at it in trying, plugging away at it I guess.

I guess the thing around the age of two that happens as well around language is that because their vocabulary is too quite small, but they're trying so hard to really put those communication skills into practice, they get a little bit frustrated sometimes. So when they want something and they know what it is and they know what they want, but they don't have all the language skills yet in the words to be able to express that and to ask for it once. That's been sometimes we start to see some behavioural things around that. So we might see some heating or some throwing themselves on the floor and little tantrums and yelling those sort of throwing toys, that sort of stuff when they get frustrated because they know what they want, they just don't quite have the skills yet to be able to really express what it is they're after. So that can be a really difficult and challenging time for parents as well when we start to see it around that two year old age, some of those behavioural skills that come along with that not quite ready language development is checked.

Episode 7: Talking
with Joanne Bottin from Karitane

Joanne: (cont...) Then by the time they get to the age of three, so two's a really big period of bringing a lot of those language skills together, they're starting to build those sentences and build their words, basket up the amount of things that they can say. So by the age of three, they've had a lot more practice now at saying those words. And so there should be some more clarity around the things that they're saying. So when they're in that sort of 18 months, two years, two and a half years, some of the words they say as parents, we often understand, but some maybe people around us can't quite understand what it is they're saying, they're not used to the way in which they pronounce things. And they sound adorable, cute little words that they say around that age are awesome and a lot of fun, but definitely by about the age of three, you'll hear some more clarity and some more clear words and a lot more understandable words for people to hear.

Tiffaney: I've got little nieces and things, so I'm around them a bit, I do hear all those little words are coming up now, and it's so lovely to be reminded of those, like you said, those little words that they say that they're trying to say something and it's kind of, sometimes you can make out what it is and sometimes you can't. So you need to ask them, ask their mum and dad, or you need to sort of ask them to repeat the word again or say, "Did you say, do you mean this or were you pointing at this and did you mean this one or whatever." So it can be tricky, but it's just such an adorable time and brings back lots of memories for me with my kids and the different words that they used to say for different things. And it was yeah, absolutely gorgeous and it's such a special time

Joanne: It's definitely a really fun time, challenging as well for parents at times, but a lot of fun to hear those different things. So there's a lot of babbling around those words as they're trying to form proper sentences. So sometimes as a parent or as an auntie, we're often listening to a sentence from a child and we're just trying to grab on to one or two words and try and make sense of what it is you're trying to tell me.

Tiffaney: It's absolutely gorgeous and the way that they look at you as if, "You should understand what I'm trying to say to you as well." And yeah, you can see that frustration sometimes, but also when you do understand them, that little joy in their face like, "Oh, they understood what I was saying." So that's really special as well.

Episode 7: Talking
with Joanne Bottin from Karitane

Joanne: It's wonderful for children when, like you say, they have that somebody heard me and understood what I say. It's a really wonderful, joyous feeling and really helps to build that confidence and that self-esteem so then they will keep trying and keep moving towards that.

Tiffany: Absolutely. What are the types of things that parents can do to enable talking with the little one? You've been through a lot now, but are there specific things that you would talk to someone about or give suggestions on when it comes to how we can get our little ones talking early on or how we can best enable talking with our baby or our child?

Joanne: So one of the skills that we can use as a parent is reading, is one of the more common practices that we would recommend. So, as I said earlier, commentating is one of the things. So always talking to our kids, but reading to them as well. So books are a really wonderful way for kids to develop their language skills and their words, their vocabulary. And one of the wonderful things about books and stories is that there is a lovely range of words within them, but we also have the capacity then as the person reading the story to really change and alter our pitch and our tone in narrating and use facial expressions. So they start to learn the emotion and the feeling around what it is that they're seeing and hearing. So when we say the word angry, and then we say that we're angry just by changing our pitch and our tone and their facial expression really changes what that word means, what that looks like in a sentence.

So by reading stories, a lot of children's storybooks who have a lot of repetition in them and a lot of books will also have rhyming words. So they become a little bit of fun and it helps to build the excitement in the children. So children, when they read too frequently, will start to form attachment to certain books. So the sound and the pitch and the tone expressions that people use when they're reading those particular stories become really fun and exciting. So kids then start to learn to think about what's actually happening in a story. They start to build their imagination skills, which helps them develop these language skills.

It also helps them to have some anticipation skills about what's coming next on the page. What's going to happen next in the story.

Episode 7: Talking
with Joanne Bottin from Karitane

Joanne: (cont...) And the wonderful thing about books is that there's all the pictures that come along with the words so they can start to really visualize, or what they are hearing from my parents. So books are a really wonderful way to help to build language skills.

Tiffany: When it comes to teaching methods and things that you would potentially encourage people to work with at home with their children, as they do get a bit older, I know you've mentioned reading, are there any other tools that you'd potentially would encourage people to engage with?

Joanne: Singing. The wonderful thing about singing is that there's a lot of movement around. We can have little actions and hand gestures and kick our legs around or dance around the lounge room, nursery rhymes that we know of or have heard ourselves growing up. And that's sometimes a lovely thing just to be able to pass down from two children from our own parents. "This is something that my mum used to sing to me or my grandparents used to sing to me." And now I'm going to sing that to you. And it comes a bit of a generational hand me down sort of thing, which is always lovely.

And that may also be songs that we hear on the radio. Obviously we'd like to be careful about the kind of songs that were playing on the radio in front of our children, the content and the wording in them certainly. But certainly there are certain songs that we hear on the radio nursery rhymes and things. So that becomes a really exciting way and a fun way for small children to learn words because they get to dance around and skip and jump and be kind of boisterous and fun and at the same time learning new words and some language skills as well.

Tiffany: A lot of people give their children screens to work from. Is that something that you would encourage and how much screen time and that sort of thing when it comes to that would you typically recommend because I think that's a big one these days?

Joanne: Yeah, it is and it's difficult for parents, I guess where our lives are really busy. So screens can be a really helpful tool for parents at times, but the recommendation is actually the children under the age of two have really minimal if any screen time at all.

Episode 7: Talking
with Joanne Bottin from Karitane

Joanne: (cont...) So the best way for language skill development is actually engaging with other people. So putting down those screens as much as possible and really engaging and being involved in sitting down on the floor and playing or going outside and kicking a ball around, or it might just be going and looking and talking about the flowers they see or the grass or the birds or things like that. So again, it's that real commentary, putting away the screens as much as possible. And realistically, I understand that it's hard for parents to live completely screen free. So what I'm saying is, I guess, to just minimize that as much as possible. Your kids are going to learn most from you and from people around them rather than from what they're seeing on the screen. So the language skills are best developed with that real face to face interaction.

Tiffany: That's always good to kind of get a handle on that thing too and just keep in mind it can be tricky to find the time or change habits if you're used to being on screens or it's something that they're going to have to do, for example when they start to go into a learning environment whether it be a preschool or a school, because obviously that's going to be a huge part of the future and it is already. So I guess it's just finding that balance, isn't it?

Joanne: Absolutely. The balance is the big part. So I guess if kids are on screens all the time, then it's so normal for them that it's not exciting, it's not that helpful a distraction tool for parents in the end, if kids are on the move all the time anyway. So it might be that if you've got to go and hang a load of washing out, rather than going here, watch the tele or play on the iPad while I go and do that, take them outside with you or get them to help pass you the pegs or they can run and kick a ball around where you hang the washing on the line and you talk about, "I'm just hanging up. The clothes are being made up, put them in the washing." And again, you're commenting on what you do.

"I can see you kicking the ball. You're doing such a great job." So because the important part of that also is that when we involve them in the task that we're doing and we're watching the task they are doing and commentating them, it gives them the confidence to continue to do those things. So if we kind of say too, if they're kicking a ball around and we're busy doing our own jobs and not sort of engaging with what we're seeing with them, then it kind of loses any kind of meaning and purpose for them.



Episode 7: Talking
with Joanne Bottin from Karitane

Joanne: (cont...) So really kind of letting them know that we see them. Kids want us. As parents, we're the most important person for them so giving them some attention in little bits throughout the day helps to take away those big attention seeking behaviours that they might see at other times as big behaviours.

So really letting them know that we're seeing what they're doing, "So I can see kicking a ball around. You're doing such a great job," helps them go, "Okay. They see me. I'm okay. We're all still aware that I'm here and I could see what I'm doing and I'm doing a great job because they said I did a good job." And that builds confidence, lets them know that we're still together and I'm okay and I'm safe. And so then they're more likely to keep doing what they're doing rather than come back and go hang on, "You haven't engaged me for a while." And then you start to get some of those attention seeking behaviours.

Tiffany: Yeah, that makes perfect sense.

Joanne: Also really talking about your emotions is a really important part of language development. So when we see kids are getting frustrated or getting angry about something or they're upset about something, it's okay to talk about that, to say, "I can see that you're getting angry and that's okay. You're allowed to be angry, we're let feel that whatever we feel, we can't control how somebody else feels." But acknowledging that is really important. "So I can see that you're getting really angry and that is okay, but it's not okay to hit somebody when you get angry." Or, "When we're feeling angry how about we try and do this from my feeling that way." So we kind of give them some words to describe what it is that they're feeling. They start to understand that when I feel like that, that's the word, that's the emotion around that. And we're also teaching them the skills to sort of deal with that.

That helps them become comfortable with letting parents know what emotion they're feeling. And that really helps really right up through to those teen years, when a teenager has grown up talking to parents around feelings and being comfortable and open around emotions, then when they're feeling sad or something's happened to them as they grow older, they're more comfortable and likely to come and use those words and say, "Actually, this is how I'm feeling and this is what's happening for me."

Episode 7: Talking
with Joanne Bottin from Karitane

Joanne: (cont...) So that starts building those conditions for that language around how we're feeling what's happening for us starts in those really early couple of years. So really talking about what it is in those emotions that we're seeing with our children helps to improve that emotional vocabulary.

Tiffany: That makes perfect sense. And like you said, if you can get in early and start those really good patterns of communication and let them know about how to express their feelings, as you said, I think it is vital. And I guess I've got teens, so I know how important it is as they get older in knowing how to communicate. So I think there's some fantastic tips. So what would be top things to kind of focus on when your little one starts to talk?

Joanne: So I guess again, starting from talking to your baby while you're still pregnant and start trying to practice using those words and being a commentator from the very beginning. And then of course, once they're born to continue using those words act as a common tie to talk about what it is you're saying and what you're doing really helps to build that vocabulary. Use expression and pitch and tone in your voice and facial expressions, because we know a big part of communication is more than just the words that we're using. So it's all that that pitch and tone in our expressions and our body language.

So using all of those things, when we're talking and doing that from pregnancy, right from birth and continuing on reading to our children, we can start doing that from when they're babies getting too into that at that pre bedtime routine is reading a little story to them or sing a little nursery rhyme to them before putting them into bed. That becomes part of that bedtime routine. And that sets them up as they get older and don't have so many sleeps during the days and are not in days when they have the story time and nursery rhymes and things before bed, that kind of sets the time for doing that as well.

So repeating words, having those words that they hear frequently, those are the words that they're going to start to use and repeating those back. So if they say, "Mummy drink, you'd like a drink from mummy?" "Okay, let's go and get a drink then." So we're acknowledging that we've heard what they've said and we're going and giving them some other words to fill that sentence and so they can start to build the skills to add similar words into their vocabulary.



Episode 7: Talking
with Joanne Bottin from Karitane

Tiffaney: Well, thank you so much for joining us today. It's been so helpful and so informative and I think it's really interesting and valuable to hear all this particularly for new parents, because it can be a challenging time, but it's such an exciting time to have your little ones start talking. So thanks again for joining us today.

Joanne: No worries. Thank you so much for having me.

Tiffaney: Well, it's been really great. So for anyone who'd like to learn more about when your baby first starts to talk and some really great research up to date information about other parenting and baby related topics, you can head to www.karitane.com.au, follow them on their socials or you can call the Karitane care line 1300-227-464