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CHILDCARE EXPO BACKS CALLS FOR PARENTS TO TALK TO THEIR BABIES

One in five parents believe it is only beneficial to communicate with their baby from the age of three months and one in eight believe responsibility for developing their child's communication skills lies outside the home.

Those are the main findings of new research conducted on behalf of the National Literacy Trust, which has launched a Talk To Your Baby campaign to educate parents about the role they can play in helping their baby develop vital communication skills in the first three years of their lives.

2011 is the National Year of Communication and the National Literacy Trust will be just one of many exhibitors at Childcare Expo in Coventry on 16th and 17th September 2011.

"The first three years are pivotal to the development of communication skills," explained Jonathan Douglas, Director of the National Literacy Trust.

"By the age of three a staggering 80% of a child's brain will be formed. A child's brain will never grow faster than at this point in their lives so we're urging every parent in the UK to use this window of opportunity to talk, talk, talk!

"We all know how vital it is to give a young child plenty of TLC. Our message is that TLR – Talking, Listening and Responding – is every bit as crucial to their future wellbeing."

The National Literacy Trust's campaign has been launched amid growing concern about the increasing number of children entering primary education without basic communication skills.

National Literacy Trust research demonstrates that to reverse this trend parents need to be helped to develop a greater understanding of how vital their role can be and how much their baby is able to understand and enjoy communicating.

- Around a quarter (23%) of parents believe less than a third (30% or less) of their child's brain has formed by the age of two and 44% of parents believe half or less of their child's brain has formed when in fact the figure is 70%
- Over a third (38%) of parents expecting their first baby are unaware that there is any benefit in talking to their baby while it is still in the womb
- One in 20 (6%) of expecting parents believe that language skills develop entirely naturally and that they have no role to play in their development
- While over three-quarters (78%) of parents believe it's crucial for children's language and speech development to be supported, one in eight (13%) believe the primary responsibility for developing communication skills in their child lies outside the home (for example, with nurseries or healthcare professionals)

As part of the Talk To Your Baby campaign the National Literacy Trust is urging parents to consciously incorporate some TLR time with their baby at least five times a day.

"TLR is the new TLC!" says Tina O'Brien, star of *Waterloo Road* and *Strictly Come Dancing* and mum to Scarlett (two).

"You and your child will get so much out of talking together and it doesn't have to be hard work. Scarlett and I chat all the time – when we're shopping, at bathtime or even while we're doing the weekly food shop. We have such a giggle when we're talking together and it's great to know that I'm giving her language skills she'll have for life."

In March the National Literacy Trust launched its new website www.talktoyourbaby.org.uk to provide information for parents and carers of babies and young children.

Parents are also being urged by the trust to commit to talk to their baby more by going online to make a pledge and give themselves a chance to win one of 150 free children's books from Walker Books and Barefoot Books.

The National Literacy Trust will be promoting its campaign at this year's Childcare Expo at the Ricoh Arena in Coventry on 16th and 17th September.

Childcare Expo is a must-attend event offering a seminar programme, a wide range of exhibitors, networking opportunities, a creative feature area and free workshops. To find out more visit www.childcareexpo.co.uk.