

Talking With Your Infant—Development of Spoken Language

What the Research Says

- Infants learn things best in social situations by interacting (listening, watching, and using their sense of touch) with family members and caregivers.
- Communication is one of the most important life skills and begins developing at birth.
- The brain is pre-wired for the development of language, *but* the brain needs stimulation through the senses (seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, smelling) in order for language development to occur.
- The first three years of life is the most intensive period for learning language. What happens during this time greatly affects future development and learning.
- Research has found that frequent communication with infants is directly related to the amount of words babies learn.
- The ways in which parents talk and respond with their infant has a profound effect on language learning.
- Infants understand language much earlier than they can produce actual words themselves.
- Recent brain research suggests that there may be an inborn tendency for infants to make sounds when they hear adults talking to them.

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Activities for Families

- Name aloud objects in your baby's world. This helps him associate spoken words with objects. Say the names of objects that already have your child's interest. For example, if your baby is looking at your pet kitten, you can say, "Look... **kitten**, nice **kitten**."
- Use words to describe *your* everyday actions as you do them. This is called *self-talk*. For example, "I'm getting a clean diaper. Here it is. Let's take the wet diaper off."
- Use words to describe *your baby's* actions. For example, "You rolled over. Look at you roll!"
- Read age appropriate books with your baby. Hearing you read the same words over and over helps her learn that spoken words have meaning.
- Play word games like "Pat a Cake" and "This Little Piggy Went to Market." The growing brain loves rhyme and rhythm.
- Sing songs with your baby. Babies love music. It teaches words but also has a soothing effect.

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Advice for Parents

- Have fun with your baby. The time you spend together; laughing, talking, and singing is important learning time.
- Provide a variety of early experiences. Playing on the floor, listening to books, walking in the yard, stroller walks in the park, being part of family gatherings all help your child build important background knowledge about their world.
- Provide feedback when your baby vocalizes. When she makes noises, make noises back. When she smiles, tell her you like her smile. When she reaches for something, acknowledge that she wants something.
- Talk to your baby during daily routines like bathing, dressing and diapering. This will help your child make sense of his world and people around him.
- Remember that your baby will understand far more words than he is able to say himself. Production of real words will occur at about age one.