

Get face-to-face with your infant for language development

Within the first 3 years of life, infants become masters of the language their community speaks. Their impressive language development skills can be tied to: a. attentional biases that make infants tune into social and linguistic signals, and b. their brains are equipped with pattern recognition skills to help learn specific sounds and structures from speech heard.

“Baby talk” helps young children attend to and process speech. Modified adult speech patterns like raising voice pitch, exaggerating different sounds, and making speech more repetitive and rhythmic all help infants language development.



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Non-verbal cues like positive and caring facial expressions, head nods and eyebrow movements coordinated with the pauses and pitch changes in their speech provide multisensory cues to aid in language learning.

During the first six months, infants mostly focus on the eyes of the speaker. This gives infants information about the emotions and intentions of people. In months 6-12, the focus for infants becomes specific patterns they hear and become increasingly engaged in

babbling, first by combining single vowel and consonant sounds (e.g., ba) and then stringing the sounds together (e.g., dadadada). By focusing their visual attention on the mouth from the eyes, the infant receives redundant and complementary auditory and visual information about the speech they are hearing.

In previous studies, singing to infants showed a greater and earlier focus on moving from looking at the eyes to the mouth. Infants look at the mouth of someone engaging them more for song than speech.

What about songs that make the mouths of singers so interesting for babies? Slower singing retention than spoken retention, greater movement of the mouth leading to greater synchrony between mouth movements and voice and smiling more when singing all promote infants' attention to the mouth. This is particularly meaningful during the latter half of the first year when infants are babbling and learning to say their first words because it highlights the mouth movements that are used as part of producing speech.

What to do? Engage with your baby by speaking and singing to them face-to-face every day. These face-to-face interactions give babies visual cues to support their attention. Look in the mirror together so that your baby sees how your facial expressions change between singing and speaking. Sing songs like “If You’re Happy and You Know It” using the lyrics to act out different emotions as you sing, making your face very expressive to your baby.

No time is too early to start talking and singing to your baby.

• Julia Robison-Schultze, a BabyRead volunteer, abstracted this from an article Co-authored by Camila Alviar, Ph.D. and Miriam Lense, Ph.D.

As you consider an end-of-year philanthropic gift, I hope you will consider giving the gift of **READING** to a baby or toddler by donating to BabyRead. Your contribution can provide young children in our community with books, children’s periodicals, and educational toys. It can enable us to continue the reading incentive program which provides BabyRead families with an Aldi gift card as a reward for reading to their little one 20 times in a month. You can help prepare a child to be successful when they enter school.

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BABYREAD’S MISSION is to raise the literacy level in Oconee County by encouraging moms/caregivers to read daily to children from birth. This prepares children for success in school and in life. Readers read with moms/caregivers in person at town libraries. Questions? Contact Caren von Hippel, Ph.D., president, at babyread@charter.net or visit our website www.babyread.org. Please donate on our website.