

HAVING A CONVERSATION WITH YOUR BABY

Having a conversation with your baby is one of the best ways to grow their brain. It may not look like or sound like a conversation that you're used to having with another adult, but having a conversation with your baby is a great way to grow their brain and we're going to talk about that in this video.

I'm Dr. Teresa Caraway from Hearing First and we're here to empower you so that you can have your child who is deaf or hard of hearing learn to listen, talk, read, and thrive.

The Harvard Center on the Developing Child has stated "When an infant or young child babbles, gestures, or cries and an adult responds appropriately with eye contact, words, or a hug, neural connections are built and strengthened in the child's brain! That supports the development of communication and social skills." Let's change how you think about having a conversation with your baby.

There's a simple, easy technique called ***It's Your Turn***. You may know it as ***serve and return***. Think of serve and return like a tennis game where you serve the ball, and the other player returns the volley, and it goes back and forth and back and forth taking turns. So, every time you initiate a communication with your baby, and you talk to your baby, you pause, and you wait, and you expect them to return your serve.

Well, that may look a little different for a baby. It could be that they smile at you. It could be that they raise their little eyebrows. It could be that they maintain an eye gaze. It could mean that they coo and goo or they make a vowel sound back or a vocalization and that's your signal that says they're returning back to you to have you take another turn and say something back to them. And so that dance continues in terms of serve and return.

And so, watch for those signs in your babies. Those early conversation skills can be very subtle. So much of the time, we as adults, we as parents, we say something, and we don't expect the baby to respond, and we just move on and keep talking. Rather, when you say something to your baby or make a comment or describe something to your baby, pause, wait, expect them to make a response.

But what happens if you're not sure that they responded? That's when you think about what else could you do or what else could you say? How could you say it? Make your voice more interesting. Have it go up and down, sing to them, and then pause and wait and build on that response. It might be very subtle at first, so make sure you have your observation skills on.

So, what does this look like in everyday life? The good news is you don't have to have a special time that says we are having conversation time. Rather, what you need to think about is that in your everyday activities, like changing a diaper, you might announce to your child, let's go change your diaper. And I'm getting ready to take your diaper off and wait for those that you may see the baby kick their legs, you

may see them squeal. Look for those things no matter if you're feeding, changing diaper, getting dressed, that you always can expect that response and have that child return. And at the same time, your child may be the one serving to you.

So, if they're initiating communication, maybe with a squeal, maybe with cooing or going, with a smile, make sure that you return that, that you build on that, because you also want them to be able to serve you communication. And it might not look like that's that big of a deal, but it's a huge deal because what you're doing is you're growing those neural connections in the brain. And the more neural connections your child's brain has, the better they're going to be able to talk and read and do well in school.

So, beginning conversations are really basic bootcamp for their future academic success. And not only are you growing their brain, but you're also doing something very important and that is bonding with your baby and sharing a connection with them and all of that is important for their overall development. But what you do today with having those conversations makes a difference in how they will learn to read and how well they'll do in school.

If you found this helpful and you'd like to learn more, we've compiled our favorite handouts and resources for you to have at your fingertips that you can use every single day.

Wherever you are on this journey, whatever you're feeling, you are not alone. Hearing First is here to support you. Make sure you subscribe to our YouTube channel and check out our website for more resources.