

PARENTS - HOW TO TALK TO YOUR BABY WITHOUT USING BABY TALK

Oh, sweet baby. Look at those little toes. I see you. Oh, I see you smile. We've all done it. We see a cute baby and our voice changes. We use shorter sentences, repeat words, stretch out vowels, and use a sing-song voice. But this isn't baby talk, this is known as parentese, and it actually helps with baby's development. Let's talk about why these important brain building one-on-one conversations with your baby matter, and why they especially make a difference for babies with hearing loss.

Hi, I'm Dr. Teresa Caraway with Hearing First. We're here to help and support families, just like yours who have a child with hearing loss. We want to empower you as your child learns to listen, talk, read, and thrive, just like kids with typical hearing.

In this video, I'll explain why parentese is so important, with the research to back it up. I'll also share how you can use it every day with your baby who is deaf or hard of hearing.

So let's be clear about parentese. While it is how you talk to a baby, it's not baby talk. Your baby doesn't learn from cutesy noises and sounds like goo goo gaga, but babies do learn from hearing you talk to them, and how you talk to them is just as important as what you say.

The research shows that when you use parentese, that sing song voice with a higher pitch and stretching out vowels, it catches a baby's attention and cues their brain that something new and exciting is happening. Parentese benefits both baby and parents. It's mutually satisfying, and supports the attachment relationship you have with your baby. It's also simpler and easier for your baby to understand. Because you're speaking slowly, it also encourages your baby to participate, maybe with a smile, a coo, or a kick with their feet. You are creating a back and forth conversation that starts with parentese. And here's the best part, it's fun, it's easy, and you're likely doing it already.

Parentese also builds strong vocabulary skills. Studies show that babies who heard parentese had almost twice the vocabulary as children who didn't.

And babies' brains begin learning to talk from the time they're born, simply by listening to those around them speak. There are two critical components to that happening. First, the baby must be able to hear in order to listen. That means if they're deaf or hard of hearing, they need appropriate hearing technology immediately after diagnosis, and wear their hearing devices all waking hours. Second, parents and caregivers must be intentional about talking with their baby.

The early conversations we have with babies pave the way for listening, spoken language, learning and literacy. The back and forth of conversation is critical to support the development of communication and social skills. While parentese is important for all babies, because it helps build the baby's brain for listening, language and understanding, it's even more important for children who are deaf or hard of

hearing. They need to hear all the highs, the lows, the patterns, and melody of speech. Even if your baby will be receiving cochlear implants, they still will benefit from wearing their hearing aids and listening to you talk in parentese. Why? Well, because parentese activates the auditory areas of the brain, and then as a result, other areas of the brain also get activated. It gets those synapses firing, and builds important interconnected neural pathways.

Before we get into some examples of parentese and the ways you can use it, let's talk about some important reminders.

1. As I mentioned, your little one needs to hear you, so make sure they're wearing their hearing devices.
2. Babies love face-to-face interaction, and it helps that little brain grow. And in fact, facial expressions are some of the first things they begin to imitate. So when talking with your baby, make sure they can see your face. For really little ones, it's best when you're holding them in your arms. And then as you get a little older, you'll focus more on audition first, or making ear contact before eye contact.
3. It's called parentese, but it's not just for parents. All caregivers should become fluent and use parentese when they talk to your baby.
4. Create a back and forth conversation with your baby, or a serve and return. After you talk to your baby, pause, wait, lean in, and let them respond to you with a smile or a coo.

Okay, let's try speaking some parentese. Now, don't be shy. Because your baby loves you being a drama mama or a dramatic daddy. And while this might feel a little awkward, just try to emphasize some words, speak slowly, and use a happy tone of voice.

You can use the Play-by-Play strategy and describe everything that's happening to your baby. This is perfect for parentese practice. If you want to learn more about Play-by-Play, we have a video linked below. So rather than trying to think of things to say to your baby, talk through what's happening in the moment, and describe the actions, reactions, and motivations as you go. Here are some examples of how to use parentese in everyday life.

For bath time, you could say, oh, daddy is drawing your bath, it's time for your bath, and you love your bath and your daddy. Oh, let's go take our bath.

During diaper changes, you could say, oh, are you all wet? Oh, no, you need a new diaper, let's go change your diaper. Oh, let's wipe off your bottom, let's put on a new diaper. Oh, you're so fresh and clean.

And for reading, when sharing a book, oh look, there's the moon. I see the moon, it's big and round. Oh, let's say goodnight moon. Goodnight moon. Okay, it's time to turn the page.

During playtime, with a rattle, you could say, listen, shake, shake, shake, I hear your rattle. Do you want the rattle? Oh, kick your, kicking your legs, kick, kick, kick. Do you want your rattle? Here, you hold your rattle, shake, shake, shake. I hear you, I hear that rattle. So use your words before you begin to shake the rattle and then you're also using the strategy, hear it before they see it, or audition first. You can learn more about that strategy in the video link below.

Remember, as a parent, you are a brain builder. And the best way to grow your baby's brain is through those meaningful interactions, when you talk, read, sing, and play together. In fact, we have a free webinar with a pediatric audiologist explaining how you can talk, read, and sing with your little one to grow their listening and talking skills. Check it out in the link below. Also, you'll find a great handout about how to include some of the strategies I mentioned in this video during everyday moments with your baby.

Wherever you are on this journey, and however you may be feeling, you are not alone. Hearing First is here to help you every step of the way. Thanks for joining. Subscribe to the YouTube channel for more helpful videos, and to learn more and find the right resources to support you on this journey. Be sure and visit hearingfirst.org.