

THE BEST TOYS FOR KIDS TO LEARN TO TALK. HINT – THEY’RE NOT WHAT YOU THINK!

One question that parents of children with hearing loss often have is, what toys do I need to have to help my child learn to listen and talk? Parents want recommendations. You want to know that you're providing your children with the right toys to grow that brain. But can I tell you a secret? It's not about this toy or that toy. You can make playtime an effective listening and language learning time, no matter the toy. Let's talk about those LSL strategies that you can use during play.

I'm Dr. Teresa Caraway with Hearing First. We're here to help you 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.

First, you should know that there's no better toy to grow your baby's brain for listening and talking than your engaging interactions during play. Playtime is how babies learn about themselves, other people, and the world around them. It helps to build confidence, relationships, and basic skills. It's also an important bonding time for the two of you.

You might feel like you don't know what to do and that you aren't creative enough, but I'm here to tell you that while most parents feel that way, you do have what it takes to engage and play with your child. Remember, playtime is fun time, so don't put pressure on yourself about structuring, activities, or play all day long. Here's some tips and suggestions for how to play the LSL way to make playtime learning time for your child.

First, follow your child's lead. Sit with them and observe what they're playing with or what they're interested in. Talk about what they're doing and join in. Your child may surprise you with what they do. Part of the fun is learning more about your child's emerging interests and skills.

Next, imitate what they're doing. Imitating what they're doing and talking about it is a great way to keep the play going and your child engaged.

Third, use LSL strategies that emphasize listening and spoken language. Hear It Before You See It and Play-By-Play are just two strategies that can be used to help you play the LSL way. Hear it before you see it. It is when you let your child hear a sound or a word before you show them the object. You're providing ear contact before eye contact. Another name for this you might hear is audition first and it's all about building your child's listening skills. Play-By-Play is when you act like a sports commentator and give a Play-By-Play description about everything that's happening. You're putting words to what's going

on around them. You're talk, talk, talking about all that your child is experiencing and good news, we have two YouTube videos explaining those strategies and more in detail so that you can learn more.

So let's talk about playing the LSL way with your baby to grow those listening and spoken language skills.

Babies love repetitive play such as peek-a-boo but how do we do this the LSL way?

First, take a scarf or a blanket or a towel, whatever you might have that's around your house and convenient and that is we're going to practice hear it before you see it and talking about it. So what that means with peek-a-boo is I'm going to hide my face. Where's Teresa? Where is she? Notice how I'm talking before I'm popping out my face and I can say, where's Teresa? Where is she? Oh, here she is, hi. And do you notice how I said all of that before I popped out from the blanket? That way you're putting the emphasis on audition first, ear contact before eye contact. They're hearing everything before they see you. That's peek-a-boo, the LSL way and your baby will love it to do it over and over and over again.

So how do you turn a baby who's banging their hands or banging their toys into a learning time?

Well, if perhaps they have toys that they like to hold and it's bang, bang, bang, and they're typically banging toys, perhaps what you can do is you can say bang, bang, bang, and then you start banging or you have them bang. So in other words, you're adding words, pausing, you're wanting them to hear that command or that simple direction of bang, bang, bang, and then they start banging their toys in response to that.

Again, it's a terrific way to look and to observe that language is starting to have meaning for your child and your baby. And it's also your baby imitating your banging. So perhaps I do one bang, bang, listen, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang. Yes, so that they're imitating how you're banging and how many times, if you're banging fast or if you're banging slow. But remember, put words to those actions, pause and wait and have them hear everything before that action starts.

And perhaps your child is a little older. While playtime activities will change as they grow, the same LSL strategies are used to play the LSL way. Remember, it's not about the toy. It's about how you use it with LSL strategies to engage with your child in whatever they're interested in. Click the link below to get more ideas about ways to play with your little one to build their listening, language, and cognitive skills.

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. Subscribe on YouTube to see new videos from Hearing First and visit hearingfirst.org to find more resources and information.