

Especially for parents of infants! 

Talk to Me...in Parentese!

 *Vocalizing and Listening*

It is never too early to have back-and-forth chats with your baby. Talking to little ones introduces them to the world of voices, sounds, and words. These earliest parent-infant “talks” help babies learn how to communicate with others.

What is the practice?

Babies love to hear the voices of familiar people. They “tune in” to what they hear. They especially get excited when they are spoken to in interesting ways. Talking to infants using both adult speech and “baby talk” can be especially interesting to little ones. Baby talk is sometimes called *Parentese* or *Motherese*. It is a type of speech where an adult talks to a child in an exaggerated and repetitive way. Parentese will make your baby look at you and make all kinds of coos and babbles. Check out the Parentese Dictionary practice guide for more ideas about using baby talk.



What does the practice look like?

Any time you and your infant are together is a fine time for talking. Imagine a father holding an infant in his arms. While the baby gazes at his father, Dad starts “talking” to him: “You see Daddy, don’t you?” The baby begins to wiggle, showing his excitement. “You hear me talking to you,” Dad continues. The baby gets even more excited. Then Dad adds some baby talk to what he is saying. In a slow and exaggerated manner, Dad croons: “Does my little Thomas hear me talking? Tom-Tom is so, soooo cuuute!”

How do you do the practice?

- Your child should be in a comfortable position where you can easily look at each other. Hold your baby in your arms. Or place him face-up stretched out on your legs.
- Start by saying anything that captures your infant’s attention (for example: “How is [child’s name] today?”) When it is mealtime, you can say something like, “It’s time for [child’s name] to eat. Are you hungry?” It is best to use words that describe what you and your child are doing together.
- Follow your child’s lead. Watch for signs or signals that tell you your infant hears or is paying attention to your voice. Some infants get “bright-eyed.” Others wiggle with excitement.
- Add baby talk to what you are saying: “(Child’s name) is soooo cuuute. (Child’s name) is such a preeetty baaaby!” Speak softly and slowly. Then start talking in a manner that exaggerates the sounds in the words.
- Go back and forth between adult speech and baby talk as you chat with your child. Your baby will “tune in” more to what is being said. She might even become more involved by trying to talk to you.
- Your baby doesn’t need to understand what you are saying. The main idea is to get him involved in the conversation.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does your child pay close attention to your face and mouth?
- Does your child seem to know the difference between adult speech and baby talk?
- Does your child vocalize and get excited when you use baby talk?

Take a look at more fun with baby talk

Bottle-Time Parentese

Six-month-old Zachary is about to be given a bottle of water. He expects that his mother will talk to him in a *funny* way! Mom holds Zachary in her arms so that they can look at each other. “Is Zach hungry?” she asks. Zachary looks up at his mother while opening his mouth. Mom continues speaking in a high-pitched, sing-song voice, saying, “Yum, yum, yummy! You are veeery thirsty! Zach loves his *ba-ba* doesn’t he?” Anytime Mom uses baby talk, Zachary’s eyes brighten and he blows bubbles with his water! The whole bottle experience is filled with a happy, back-and-forth talking between Zach and his mom.



High Excitement



Anthony’s father is putting his 8-month-old son in the stroller seat for a walk to the store. “Are we getting ready to *go bye-bye*?” he says. Excitement spreads all over the baby from head to toe! Anthony smiles, vocalizes, and shakes all over. Dad says, “We are going to the store to get Anthony some food for *din-din*. What should we get?” Anthony joins in and starts vocalizing to his dad. In a high-pitched voice, Dad says, “You are such a *haaandsome* little boy! Daddy loves you *soooo, soooo much!*” Anthony loves it when his father talks to him this way. The more animated and exaggerated his dad’s voice and expression, the more Anthony “talks” back.

Exaggeration Power

Evan is 7 months old and has a hearing loss. His father has a fun way to get Evan to hang on to every sound and sign he makes. He does it most any time (meals, bath, nap, play, etc.). Evan’s father talks to him in a high-pitched, exaggerated voice paired with big, expressive sign language. One of Evan’s favorite activities is outdoor play because his father acts so silly! Dad makes slow, exaggerated mouth movements when he is playing in the yard with Evan. “Up in the tree house!” Dad says as he signs *up* and opens his mouth wide. Evan opens his mouth as much as he can. Both father and son are “hooked” on each other’s every movement!

