

INFANT
COMMUNICATION

(1 Training Hour)

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HOW BABIES COMMUNICATE:

Although most babies don't do much intelligible talking in their first year beyond "mama," "dada," "baby," and a few other simple words, they acquire a good deal of verbal comprehension by age one. Your child will know her own name and those of her caregivers. She'll recognize a number of words, associate some words with objects or pictures of objects, and probably be able to respond nonverbally to simple statements and commands.

She will also have a good-sized nonverbal vocabulary. The newborn who cries when hungry is communicating instinctively. The eight month old who cries for attention is communicating deliberately. Parents learn rather quickly to distinguish among hungry cries, wet and uncomfortable cries, sleepy and fussy cries, angry cries, and later attention and "I need help" cries.

As an infant grows, your baby will become a master of facial expressions and body language. Smiling and laughing, wiggling, staring, touching and kicking the infant will increasingly use the body to signal feelings and needs. Toward the end of the first year, gestures will become specific, as when the infant holds out arms to be picked up or points to the cup when wants a drink. Whether the medium is verbal or nonverbal, whenever meaning is shared between the child and the caregiver, real communication is taking place.

First Lessons in Language

Babies hear sounds in the womb and become accustomed to background noise. The newborn will, however, startle at sudden, loud sounds. The infant responds to soothing sounds and voices. Most babies have an early preference for higher-pitched voices and are likely to react to female voices first. As their hearing becomes more acute, they respond to the lower male range.

Newborns make a lot of sounds naturally, for example, sighing, breathing, sucking, and smacking noises. As they learn to manufacture sounds, their range expands to include cooing and gurgling, followed by laughing, giggling, squealing, razzing, and coughing. They begin experimenting with sounds that are basics of language, for example, vowel sounds at first, then consonants. At about six months, babies are sensing that certain words are attached to certain people, objects, and actions. Within another couple of months or so, they will be putting the simple sounds together.

TALKING TO YOUR BABY:

It's never too soon to start talking to your baby. Though the infant has no comprehension of what you're saying, infants will pick up how language works and how meaning is conveyed by inflection, pitch, tone, and volume. Infants hear the rudiments of grammar, and toward the end of the first year, the infant will probably be able to distinguish between a simple statement, a question, and a command. If you talk with--not at--the infant, they hear and see that conversations are a mutual give and take.

If you feel self-conscious talking to your baby--many parents do--keep in mind how important this aspect of parenting is. As your baby begins to respond to your voice and words, talking to the infant will become enjoyable. One suggestion is to start with a simple running description of whatever you are doing. Other early ways to encourage your baby's communication skills include:

- **Using names for people and objects as often as possible.** Your baby can't even learn her own name unless you address her frequently by name.
- **Asking questions.** Show your interest by giving the baby a chance to respond with own coos and sounds.
- **Imitating sounds.** The infant will eventually begin to imitate yours--an essential part of speech development.
- **Reading to the infant.** At this early stage, it doesn't matter whether you read the sports pages or a book, but you will probably introduce picture books around six months.
- **Singing to your baby.** You will never have a more receptive audience.

All word play should be fun for you and your child. When your infant loses interest, they will signal that it's time to be quiet by becoming fussy or just turning away. Follow your infant's cues. Keep in mind that you can't force learning; rather, you are establishing the habits of language and communication.

Baby Talk

Some parents or caregivers worry about baby talk, but there is a difference between

what is known as *parentese* and *babyish* talk. Raising the pitch of your voice for a newborn helps to get attention and makes sound pleasurable to them. Using nouns helps to get infants to identify and name individuals and objects. Speaking in simple sentences and questions helps infants to begin to understand language forms and functions. Repetitive rhymes and songs help master the rhythms of speech. These are all examples of parentese.

Babyish talk involves distorting language by, for example, adopting infantile terms in your ordinary speech. If your language is babyish, your child's will be as well. Some baby words are acceptable, like "kitty" and "dolly"; just don't over do it. Also avoid treating your child's early words as entertainment. When adults laugh and applaud every time a baby mispronounces a word in a charming manner, the child naturally concludes that what she is saying is correct.

When your baby begins to comprehend language, sometime around six or seven months, encourage her learning by:

- * **Speaking clearly and at a normal pace.** Too-rapid speech is confusing for adults, so consider the effect on a baby who is just beginning to sort out words and meanings.
- * **Emphasizing the words and objects that are part of your baby's daily life.** use the correct words for everything in your baby's world--and avoid babyish talk say "bottle," not "baba"; "pillow" rather than "pi-wo." Repeat, repeat, repeat.
- * **Introducing abstract terms and concepts.** ("This blanket feels very soft." "Zack's block is lying under the kitchen table.") Begin to describe things by their colors, sizes, and shapes ("the big blue blanket," "the round ball").
- * **Continuing to repeat the sounds your baby makes;** the baby will be flattered, and the habit of imitation will be affirmed.
- * **Beginning to use simple commands.** (Wave bye-bye." "Give daddy a hug.") Show your child what you want them to do.
- * **Listening to your baby and being responsive.** By nine months to a year, the infant will probably be trying to form words, but a distracted or inattentive caregiver can miss her efforts at speech, thereby discouraging further attempts.

A parent or caregiver who really listens can become adept at translating a child's first efforts. Don't worry much about pronunciation; your child is likely to have difficulty with certain sounds until is five or six or even older. If your twelve month old manages to verbalize a simple thought such as "babee ju," you can say something like, "That's very good, Kaitlyn. You want a cup of juice," both praising her efforts and giving her a lesson in correct speech. When you give her the juice, she will begin to make the connection between her words and the result she wanted.

Use the "Magic Words" Now

"Please" and "thank you" are the most important words in the etiquette lexicon, so using these courtesies from the beginning will establish the habit with your child. Introduce the magic words by using them often. Even a six-month-old can begin to sense the difference between "Drink your milk" and "Please drink your milk." Thank your child whenever they do something for you ("Thank you for not wiggling") or someone else ("Thank you for giving Daddy your toy"). This early attention is fundamental to the development of a courteous child.

THE READING HABIT:

Literacy encompasses the ability to speak, read, and write in one's standard language. It is essential to all aspects of life in the modern world, including etiquette. Literacy is the portal to ideas and the foundation of education; it is fundamental to success in the workplace.

Your attitudes toward reading and learning now will have a powerful effect on your child's ultimate level of literacy. A parent or caregiver who approaches reading to the baby as a chore conveys a message. A parent or caregiver who is seen reading for their own pleasure and education is conveying a quite different message. Even in their first year, children can sense their parents or caregivers negative or positive feelings about reading.

A baby's interest in being read to will be variable--attention span is very short, and is easily distracted--but the awareness of reading material and how it is used is growing. At six months, your infant will probably chew on a book; by nine or ten months or so, they will open it, turn the pages, and perhaps look at the pictures. By a year, they may be able to point out a few objects in picture books when you say the words. Through early exposure, they get the feel of books and learns that books are entertaining.

INTERACTIVE GAMES AND PLAY:

Throughout your child's first three years, learning and playing are intimately linked. One of the earliest games you play with your infant will probably be Peek-a-boo. Before five months or so, they will most likely to react with interest and often a questioning look. Then reaction will become giggles, and they may imitate you by hiding their own face. It won't be long before you can vary the game by covering an object with a blanket and letting them find it. Peek-a-boo and other early games are so traditional that parents and caregivers may not be aware of their learning purpose. But hiding games help to teach that individuals and objects have permanence; they exist even when they cannot be seen---an intellectual concept and a fundamental element of trusting building.

Tried-and-True Games

Playing simple games is fun and also demonstrates key principles including cooperation, sharing, taking turns, communicating and understanding instructions.

- * **Pat-a-cake** allows your child to participate at increasingly complex levels as they learn to bring their hands together and clap to anticipate the appropriate actions.
- * **Eyes, Nose, Mouth** and other body games let you teach your baby the words for their body parts. Parents or caregivers who are uncomfortable using the correct terms may find their discomfort alleviated through these simple body games.
- * **Action games such as Itsy Bitsy Spider** allow more complicated interplay between words and actions as well as teaching concepts like "up" and "down." Your baby probably won't master the gestures until his second year, but you can guide him through the movements.
- * **One, Two, Buckle My Shoe** is a classic counting game that uses numbers in sequence, and **This Little Piggy** also relies on the concept of things happening sequentially.

Every culture has its learning games, and these traditions are an excellent way to introduce your child to aspects of her cultural and ethnic heritage. Early games stimulate your baby's intellect, enhance their communication skills, and encourage socialization. When they play This Little Piggy with a grandparent or older sibling, they are socializing by cooperating with someone else in order to have fun. They are sharing a structured social experience, though they won't comprehend this for some time.

In conclusion, probably no other skill is as important to a child's ultimate success--in school, career, and all social interactions--as the ability to communicate effectively. Language will also be your fundamental tool for teaching etiquette and appropriate social behavior, and you can start your baby on the path to clear communication by talking to them now.

Student Name: _____ **Date:** _____

INSTRUCTIONS: Read each of the following questions carefully and **CIRCLE** your best answer.

- 1. Showing your interest by giving your baby a chance to respond with his or her own coos and sounds is an example of?**
 - A. Asking questions
 - B. Imitating sounds
 - C. Reading to your infant
 - D. Singing to your baby

- 2. Babies hear sounds in the womb?**

TRUE or FALSE

- 3. What are examples of parentese?**
 - A. Using nouns helps to get infants to identify and name individuals and objects
 - B. Speaking in simple sentences
 - C. Questions helps infants to begin to understand language forms and functions
 - D. All of the above

- 4. By the age of one your child should know her own name and those of her caregivers?**

TRUE or FALSE

- 5. Using words like “Kitty” or “Dolly” are examples of?**
 - A. Parentese
 - B. Babyish talk

- 6. Babies are sensing that certain words are attached to certain people, objects and actions at what age?**
 - A. 3 months
 - B. 6 months
 - C. 9 months
 - D. 12 months

- 7. “Wave bye-bye” and “Give mommy a hug” are examples of?**
 - A. Introducing abstract terms and concepts
 - B. Listening to your baby and being responsive
 - C. Speaking clearly and at a normal pace
 - D. Beginning to use simple commands

8. At four months old a child can begin to sense the difference between “Drink you milk” and “Please drink your milk”?

TRUE or FALSE

9. What age does your baby begin to comprehend language?

- A. 4 or 5 months
- B. 6 or 7 months
- C. 8 or 9 months
- D. None of the above

10. In their first year, children can sense their parents or caregivers negative or positive feelings about reading?

TRUE or FALSE

11. Playing simple games is fun and also demonstrates key principles including?

- A. Cooperation and sharing
- B. Taking turns and communicating
- C. Understanding instructions
- D. All of the above

12. Probably no other skill is as important to a child’s ultimate success in school, career and all social interactions as the ability to communicate effectively?

TRUE or FALSE

FILL OUT YOUR INFORMATION BELOW AND SEND YOUR COMPLETED TEST TO THE ADDRESS BELOW.

INCLUDE YOUR CHECK or MONEY ORDER for \$ 5.00 (PER TEST)

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

School Name: _____

MAIL TO:

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