



Parent Pages

Resources for Christian Parents in the 21st Century

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Hello, Baby!

Every minute of every day, babies all over the world hear their mother's voice for the first time. In each case, the baby begins a journey toward learning language. Babies are born recognizing the sound of their mother's voice. They are keenly aware of her voice and will focus on it intently. After two weeks, Dad's voice is just as important. The sound of parent voices activates two different centers of the brain, connecting language and emotion. This aspect of language is so strong that within a few months' time, infants can tell the difference between words that are a warning and words that indicate praise, even from an unfamiliar person in an unfamiliar language. They are learning more than we can imagine.

"Can baby say 'Ma-ma?'"

Babies are statisticians. They listen for repeat sounds to figure out which are important. By 10 months, babies have zeroed in on the sounds they need for their language and have begun to listen for repeat words and syllables. They also listen for language patterns such as typical grammar sequences.



All of this not only helps them learn to talk but also assists later with reading. This is why talking with your children and reading to them are the two best things you can do to develop strong reading skills. A child with rich language skills can learn to read in a matter of months, even if he starts with no knowledge of the alphabet; sounds and language patterns come first.

"Mommy thinks Billy needs a nap."

Certain words such as a baby's own name or the names for mother and father serve as anchor words. Babies recognize these words early on and will learn words that follow them. In the beginning, babies are listening for familiar words and connecting them to new words. Later, when a child has a good vocabulary, she shifts to listening for unfamiliar words. If you find yourself talking in the third person or using your baby's name in each sentence, you are teaching language. Amazingly enough, children do not grow up to talk this way; at least not until they are parents.

"Look at the doggie!"

When you talk to your baby while pointing to something, you are engaging in joint attention. Babies will begin to copy this before they can talk. It is an important gesture that has many implications. Joint attention means that two individuals are thinking about the same thing. This is the beginning of abstract thinking and most kinds of learning. When words accompany facial expressions, children begin to learn the parts of language expressed by the face and body, as well as gaining a better understanding of the situation. Being able to read these parts of language is essential to understanding and to good social skills.

"Baby is soooo big!"

The singing nature of talking to babies has its purpose too. When we talk in this way, we slow down speech and enunciate sounds, allowing babies to study what we say and how we say it. This also connects language to music,

which can help both skills to develop. Singing to your child will teach many things from language to self-regulation. Don't worry if you are not a candidate for a talent show; your baby will learn good things from your singing.

"Here we go, into the warm bathwater."

The words you say to baby while performing the routines of the day help him not only to learn language but also to predict what will happen next. Even young toddlers will lift up a foot when they hear the word "shoes." The words you say to your baby help him to make sense of the world.

Language development happens from before day one and is very important to so many aspects of your child's life. It is essential to pay attention to this development and to mention any concerns to your child's doctor. If your infant does not maintain eye contact or your older infant still does not engage in joint attention, this is cause for concern. Likewise, if your toddler does not turn when you call his name or is not interested in communication, this needs to be addressed promptly. Much can be done to teach these skills to children. The earlier this type of instruction begins, the



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easier it will be for your child to use language for other learning.

"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer" (Psalm 19:14).

Remember that your talk is as important as food and water to your baby's survival. Research clearly shows that babies learn language from people, not from screens, so it is recommended that you turn off the television and turn on your voice. Your baby is intently studying your words, your singing, and your gestures to learn

the language that will help her to learn everything else. Why not end the day with a language lesson and plan to sing your favorite Bible song at bedtime tonight? You will be teaching your child more than you can imagine.

For further study: This mind in the making site has interesting information on child development. www.mindinthemaking.org

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