

Listen Up!

Cost: None

Mess factor: None

Suggested location: Anywhere

Experiences your children will have

- Responding to your voice in a variety of ways
- Responding nonverbally to simple statements or requests

Materials

- None

Beginning

Place younger infants on their back on a blanket on the floor, a changing table, or a bed. Older infants can sit independently (on the floor or in another place).

Middle

If your infant is lying on their back, begin talking by saying something like “It feels good to stretch out on your back and kick your legs!” Model conversation patterns by pausing in between sentences, which gives your infant time to explore your facial expressions, process your words and the inflection of your voice, and conjure up a response. Your child may respond to your voice by establishing eye contact, smiling, or cooing.

Try moving to the opposite side from which your child is looking and say your child’s name to see if he or she responds. Make a game of it, and move to the other side of your infant to see if your child moves their head to find your voice.

If you give infants frequent opportunities to hear language (called *receptive* language), they will begin to understand some of your words. Try playing a game by saying something like “I’m going to touch your nose!” and then pause. If your infant doesn’t respond (by wrinkling or touching their nose), touch their nose and say “I found your nose!” If your infant does touch their nose, you’ll know that he or she understands and is ready to continue playing (i.e., by replacing “nose” with “toes”).

End

Younger infants will give you cues that they are growing tired of this activity by beginning to cry, squirming on the floor, or arching their back. Older infants will also give you cues (e.g., may look away) when they are finished playing the game.

Older children

Toddlers can respond to simple statements and requests with words, connect their own experiences to the conversation, and respond in more of a give-and-take manner. Continue to give your children opportunities to listen to you speak; as they grow and develop, enjoy listening to their new vocabulary and ideas.

Hints

- Infants learn language through natural interactions with you and their environment. Avoid bombarding them with too many questions; instead, ask meaningful questions, for example, “Are you ready to go outside and swing?” Before they can respond verbally to your questions, infants will show that they understand you by gesturing, signing, pointing, or shaking their head “Yes” or “No.”
- Decoding language is a major developmental milestone for infants. As infants continue to develop, they will begin to understand and respond to your simple statements or requests (e.g., a child might crawl over to pick up their “blankie” when told, “It’s time to go to night-night”). Encourage infants’ increased understanding of language by acknowledging their response (e.g., you might say, “You found your blankie; you’re ready for bed. We’ll go rock for a few minutes, and then I’ll put you in your crib”).

More!

Talk to infants throughout your daily activities. For example, you might say, “It’s time to put on your pants. I need your leg. Let’s put your leg through. Where are your toes? There they are!”

Talk about what your child is experiencing when you go for a walk in the neighborhood. You might say, for example, “I hear the birds chirping” or “The sun feels warm on your legs.” Immerse your child in language, and don’t shy away from using interesting words and vocabulary. As you speak, remember to pause in a natural, conversational pattern after each sentence, giving your child time to process your words and verbally or nonverbally respond. Your child won’t understand everything you are saying but will eventually learn language by hearing it modeled.

Special needs accommodations

If you find that your infant frequently doesn’t respond to your voice, speak to your pediatrician about your concerns. If your infant has a diagnosed hearing impairment or a developmental delay, be sure that your infant can see your face and your hands when you speak. Communicate with your infant using words, facial expressions, simple gestures, and signs for frequently used words. Also, be sure to reduce or eliminate the many kinds of background noise and speak slowly and clearly.