

Language & Learning

Building Conversations

Getting Started

In the early weeks and months of your baby's life, you and your baby will make many discoveries about how to connect. Your animated face and voice will bring consistent smiles from her. Your baby will kick and move her arms to show she is excited to see you. She will look into your eyes, listen to your voice and watch intently as your facial expressions change. These enjoyable social interactions are the first step in your communication journey together.

During the first eight months of life, babies are learning how to pay attention to those around them and how to engage in social routines with others. This early social-emotional development is a main building block for communication. Interactions we think of as "baby games" are essential for getting communication started. When babies engage with others, they regularly respond with warmth, smiles and an expectation that "this is going to be fun." This happens as early as three to four months of age and makes parenting a rewarding adventure.

click on image to view movie

Here is an example of a daddy and his 4-month-old baby girl. Notice how intently she watches him. They fall into a nice rhythm of taking turns. Daddy smiles or talks and the baby "answers" with her voice and facial expressions. Then...it's daddy's turn to respond again. You can sense the warmth between them.

Communication is a lot like a friendly game of volleyball or tennis. The ball goes back and forth between partners. They get into a nice rhythm. They try not to hog the ball. They enjoy each other's company. Getting ready to communicate with your baby is just like this...enjoying each other, getting into a rhythm and taking social turns. Keep in mind that each baby is unique...what delights one will quiet another. Trust your instincts as you work to find a rhythm that is comfortable for you and your baby. The pleasure you two share will give your baby a sense of security and motivate her to learn.

You might be thinking...."what is so special about all of this? Isn't this what moms and dads do with any baby?" You are right. Communication with your deaf or hard of hearing baby will start in much the same way as it does with any baby. The message you want to communicate with your face, voice and body is, "we love you...let's have some fun together."

You can follow some simple guidelines as you get started with your wee little one:

- **W**atch closely. What is your baby's mood? Try to get into a rhythm that matches your baby's mood. If the baby fusses, you can respond with a sympathetic face and soothing voices. If she smiles, use an animated face and voice in response.
- **E**ncourage the baby to look at your face and listen to you. The baby will be interested in looking at you if you use various facial expressions and play social games that build anticipation. Vary your vocal inflections (like we normally do in baby talk) to encourage the baby to begin to listen to your voice.
- **E**njoy your baby. Parents tell us that it can be hard to focus on typical baby routines when they are worrying about the hearing loss. It can really help to talk with other parents and discover the enjoyment they have found as they gain more perspective on the hearing loss. Other parents can reassure you that "it's going to be all right." Focusing on this message, you can relax a bit and enjoy your little one.