

# LOVING WORDS FOR BABIES

## Why you need to fill your baby's world with words



### How We Test Your Baby's Hearing

We test your baby's hearing before discharge. Depending on any risk factors that may exist for hearing loss in your baby, we will select either "OAE" or "ABR" testing. Here's how they work:

**OAE stands for Otoacoustic Emissions testing.** A tiny probe with a soft cover is inserted into your baby's ear canal. A series of sounds are played through the probe and a tiny microphone in the probe listens for an "echo", indicating normal functioning of the ear. OAE testing is used for low-risk newborns.

**ABR stands for Auditory Brain Response.** This test involves several wires which are held to the forehead, neck and shoulder with some sticky patches. Then, a probe with a soft cover is inserted in the ear canal and plays a series of clicks. The machine watches for changes in your baby's brain waves that indicate the sounds have been heard. ABR testing is used with babies who have risk factors for hearing loss, such as a NICU stay.

In both cases, the test requires that the baby is calmly asleep during the test, which can be tricky after we've just pushed a probe in the ear! We will work with you to find the best time for testing.

If your baby **PASSES** the screening, this is great news, but does not guarantee that your baby will **ALWAYS** be able to hear. You need to continuously pay attention to how your baby responds to sounds and voices and discuss any concerns with your healthcare provider.

If your baby **FAILS** the screening (called "refers"), it means that the baby needs further testing. There are a number of reasons a newborn "refers", including fluid in the ear from birth, and the baby being too awake, squirming or sucking during the test. However, (although rare) sometimes it means the baby really **DOES** have a hearing loss, which is why it is **SO IMPORTANT** to follow-up the testing. Babies with hearing loss do much better if they get help very early in their lives. We will assist you to arrange follow-up testing, which will be done after your hospital stay.

Your newborn is a miracle to behold. Perfect little toes, bright eyes, fingers that eagerly grasp your own, a thousand expressions to charm you. Did you know that your baby's **BRAIN** is still developing – in fact, 85% of brain development happens in the first 3 years of life. That works out to nearly a thousand new connections being made in the brain **EVERY SECOND!**

You already know how important nutrition is to your new baby. Just as critical is the nourishment you provide to your baby's **BRAIN**, especially in the first few years. The good news is that **IT IS FREE and YOU CAN DO IT.** Here's how:

### Talk to your baby. A lot. Pretty much all the time.

Studies have shown that babies who grow up in households where the parents talk frequently to them have heard about 30 million more words by the time they start school than children whose parents do not talk much. "Parent talk can drastically improve school readiness and lifelong learning in everything from math to art. Parent talk is a fundamental, critical factor in building grit, self-control, leadership skills, and generosity."<sup>1</sup>

### Some "baby-talk" is good for your baby.

Research shows that "baby talk", where grown-ups use a slightly higher voice and draw words out a bit longer, actually helps babies learn language, and babies are attracted to and interested in these "conversations."

**Talk to your baby throughout the day, even before your baby "can talk".** Look into your baby's face. Respond to any sounds the baby makes by "talking back", imitating the sound and expanding on it. "You said 'Gee' when I touched your tummy. Is your tummy ticklish?"

### Use kind and positive words.

Take the "10 to 1" pledge – that for every negative thing your child hears ("No-no- don't do that"), let them hear 10 positive statements. ("I love you." "Look how strong you are!" "You really like those yellow buttons, don't you?") This is critical for your child's development of self-confidence and the ability to learn.

Whenever you can, substitute sentences that tell what is desirable, rather than NO. ("Oh, we need to touch the doggie gently, or he'll get scared" instead of "No, no, don't poke the doggie's eyes!")

### Tell your baby about their world, and about what's going on.

Talk to your baby throughout the day. Be descriptive. Simple things like a diaper change or bath can provide lots of "word food" for your baby's brain. "I'm going to wash your hair now. Oh, is that nice and warm? You like having your hair washed, don't you? Look at all the bubbles!"

### Tune In – Turn It Off

Resist the urge to attend to electronics when your baby is awake. The importance of your one-on-one attention to your baby's developing brain and language cannot be emphasized enough.

### TV and "Screen time" Doesn't Count

Babies absolutely need **INTERACTIVE** experiences with all sorts of words. With the exception of a "FaceTime" type application where a loved one is talking back and forth, the words your baby is hearing from electronics and TV are not helpful.

*Before you leave the hospital, you will receive a gift bag generously provided by the Family Reading Partnership, with your baby's first book, a library card and a lot of great tips on how to **TALK, SING, READ and PLAY** with your baby, every day. Check it out!*

<sup>1</sup> Suskind, Dana MD (2015). Thirty Million Words. Dutton.

### How Can You Read a Book To an Infant?

Reading to your baby at least every day, right from the beginning, is so important to your baby's language development. Many new parents are unsure "how", because babies aren't exactly interested sometimes! **RELAX.** Hearing your voice, the rhythms of the text, the sounds of the words, the repetition of the stories are all important parts of the puzzle that your baby's brain is working to solve.

- It's okay if the baby doesn't seem to be interested.
- You don't have to read children's books - read anything!
- If your baby just wants to chew on the board book, that's fine! Talk to your baby about the story or the pictures.
- You don't have to read the text - you can point to and discuss whatever your baby seems to be attracted to.
- Sometimes, follow the words you're reading with your finger. Eventually the baby learns that in English, we read from left to right, and that those shapes on the page correspond with sounds.
- Have fun! This should be a wonderful, cuddly, enjoyable time with your precious baby.



“Babies aren't BORN smart. They are MADE smart by parents talking with them.”

Dana Suskind, MD Author, Founder and Director of The Thirty Million Words Initiative

What loving words will YOUR baby hear?

Please feel free to add your own **LOVING WORDS** to our collection by filling out one of the hearts and pinning it on our border.

