

## Language & Learning

### Building Concepts

#### How Can I Find Out What I Want To Know?

Babies are curious. Being curious helps them to learn. When babies are curious they ask questions. Your baby may not ask questions with words, but when you see your baby look around the room for the toy that rolled under the couch, you know the question is “Where?” When your baby picks up a new object and looks at you with a puzzled face, you know the question is “What’s this?” When the teddy bear’s button eye suddenly comes off and your baby shows it to you, you know the question is “What happened?”

You have learned how to respond to gestures and facial expressions, but how do you help your baby begin to use words to ask questions? Hearing children learn to ask questions by “overhearing” questions and answers. They figure out how questions work. Hard of hearing or deaf babies with cochlear implants may miss the question-answer routines unless their attention is drawn to the conversation. Your baby needs to have a chance to watch or listen to other people asking and answering questions. Deaf children who sign are often left out of question-answer routines because hearing people forget to sign the questions they ask other hearing people.

What can you do? You can actively use questions with other people when your baby is present. You can be sure that both the questions and the answers are accessible and interesting.

A question model with family members might go like this:

**Baby:** Looks around the room searching for brother.

**Mom:** (Asks herself in speech or sign) “Hmmmmm. Where is John?” (Puts child’s thought into words). “Let’s ask Dad.” (Models for baby) “Dad, where is John? (Encourages baby to look at Dad).

**Dad:** (Answers at the baby’s eye level) “He is outside.”

**Mom:** (To baby). “Okay. Let’s go outside!”

Parents also ask their babies questions. Questions encourage babies to practice the new words and ideas they are learning. Questions are part of parent/baby conversations. Remember, however, that if you ask all the questions, your baby is only learning to answer. If you are paying attention to your baby’s communication, then often your baby’s turn will be a question and your turn will be an answer. When that happens, you are following your baby’s lead, and your baby is using questions for their main purpose: learning.