

Language & Learning

Building Concepts

What Do I Hear?

You can help your baby understand that some things make sounds. Although hearing aids or cochlear implants can help make the most of your baby's residual hearing, what is making the sound and why the sound is happening still need to be learned. If your baby reacts to a sound, your job is easy. You react too, look around, and talk about the sound source. "You heard the dog." "Listen! Do you hear daddy? Daddy is calling you."

The baby who is hard of hearing sometimes ignores unknown or very soft sounds because they are not yet meaningful. Your job as your guide is to give them meaning. Your job is to call your baby's attention to sounds and give those sounds a name. You can say..."Listen! I hear something outside. What is it? (this builds excitement about the sound)" You both run to the window, and there is the neighbor, starting to mow the lawn. Then you add, "Oh it was the lawn mower. Hear that? It is noisy!" Once your baby does notice a particular sound, you may have to respond again and again: "You heard the lawn mower. Let's look outside." It is okay to repeat. Your baby isn't bored. Maybe you play a game of hide and seek. Listen for daddy calling from behind the couch. Prompt your child, saying, "Listen. I hear daddy. Let's find daddy!"

Your parent-infant teacher will guide you in techniques for encouraging your baby's auditory learning. Some general guidelines apply, however:

A first goal is checking the hearing aids and working to get hearing aid use well established.

Before your baby can make the best use of hearing aids, you need to be sure they are working. To find out more, go to the hearing aid check portion of our website. It is helpful to check the aids and put them on when the baby gets dressed in the morning. It becomes a natural part of the dressing routine. Your baby may enjoy hearing the sing-song of your voice ("I love you...You are SOOO big) as you turn on the device. Watch to see if your baby appears to listen or makes sounds as the device is turned on. Talk to your parent-infant teacher about differences you notice when baby has the device(s) turned on. Ask for assistance from other parents, your baby's audiologist and your parent-infant teacher if your baby does not want to keep device(s) on. Check out the hearing aid page for additional tips on retaining the hearing aid.

Provide an environment for your baby that is conducive to listening.

Our homes are noisy places. You will want to limit auditory distractions (e.g., tv on in the background, blender, noisy fans) when you are spending quality language time with your child. Get close to the baby and use an animated face and voice while playing together. A quiet background environment will help your baby hear this stimulation.

Create opportunities for listening throughout the day.

You may already be good at pointing out sounds and naming them. What else can you do to encourage listening? Your own voice is a great tool! Suppose your baby is quiet and alert in the high chair. Call your baby's name in a natural manner as you approach the high chair. Over time, your baby will learn to turn when his or her name is called. By repeating the game of calling his name as you approach, you give the baby a chance to learn this skill. Try it during peek-a-boo. Does your baby wait to hear you calling and then pull down the cover to find your face?

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Use your voice to present interesting sound patterns for your baby to hear. At first, your baby may respond best to sounds that are quite different from one another (e.g., beep beep beep for the toy car will sound much different than aaaaaaaaaah for the airplane). You can associate sounds with favorite toys and activities. As the child hears familiar patterns (e.g., up! Each time he is lifted; wheeeeeeee! as daddy tosses baby; rock-rock in the rocking chair), the patterns will start to make sense. For more information, check out the John Tracy Clinic correspondence course for families at www.jtc.org.

The baby with profound deafness may not hear most sounds, even with hearing aids. Remember that sounds are still in the environment, and that they have a purpose. You can make your baby aware of the sources of sound that you hear. You can say, "The phone is ringing. Wait a minute," before you leave to answer it. This keeps your baby informed of what is happening. If your baby is being considered for a cochlear implant, it is valuable to provide auditory stimulation with hearing aids prior to the surgery. Be sure your baby wears the hearing aids in the months before the implant surgery. Imitate sounds your baby makes. Encourage your baby to listen to sounds you make.