

Language & Learning

Building Concepts

What is its name?

All that mouthing, looking, feeling and exploring in the first year helps babies learn what objects are all about. Around the first birthday, babies make an important discovery...."Even though my bottle is not here, I remember my bottle....and I want it now!" Once objects stay in memory like this, words become important tools. Everything has a name. The first question that babies ask, with words, gestures, or facial expression, seems to be: "What's that?" They learn names for things fast. Parents help babies along by looking at what baby is looking at and using the name for it.

You want to be close to your baby and at eye level, so that both of you can attend to the object and listen to the word. If you are encouraging your baby to watch your face, then move your face close to the object before you speak. It is best to tune into your baby's attention. Babies easily become fascinated with whatever they are exploring. They typically do not want to stop at look at something the adult wants to talk about. Watch what holds your baby's interest and talk about those things and their actions. You've heard it many times before...follow the baby's lead and give words to match baby's interest.

Tips for families using spoken language:

There are lots of good times to talk about the names for things. Be sure your child's hearing aid or cochlear implant is working. Get on your child's level, if possible (e.g., join her on the floor; sit his pumpkin seat close to you on the couch).

- Notice what your baby reaches for. If she reaches for toes, talk about toes. If she chews on a hat, talk about that!
- You can encourage your baby to listen to the word, and then look and listen in natural ways. Suppose you notice baby is hungry. You can say, "Listen, what's in daddy's bag?" (dad shakes the crackers). "Oh, I have crackers! (then bring them into baby and dad's line of vision). Crackers, see? You want a cracker? Yes, you are excited!"
- Everything has a name. Remind family members to name things that interest baby. It is easy for us to fall into a habit of using "it" (put it in). When baby is first learning words, use names instead (put the block in).

(continued on page 2)

Tips for families who are signing:

- If your baby depends on vision, then remember that you have to wait for the baby to look at the object first. Then, you can do some of the things that Deaf parents do to call attention to the names of the objects.
- You can make the sign on the object itself. Your baby's eyes are already there, or they soon will be if you are signing there.
- You can produce the sign for the object your baby is looking at, as soon as the baby looks at you for information.
- You can point to something interesting, and, if your baby pays attention, name the object.
- You can move interesting objects into your baby's field of vision to attract attention.
- You can move so that your baby can see you easily

If you are using sign language with your baby, then you will find that the trick is to keep up with all the names your baby wants to know. That seems like an overwhelming task at first, but it really isn't. Babies will want to know the same thing many times. At the beginning of language development, they need to see or hear a word hundreds of times before they really know it. That gives you a chance to practice. Remember that you know your baby well. If you pay attention to the things that are interesting, and that are often in your baby's field of vision, you will know the names to learn. If you know what your baby often does, and feels, and tastes, and hears, then those are the words to look up and practice right away. If you don't quite remember, make a list!

Label, label, label, all day long. Name objects, but not just objects. Language is more than nouns. Name actions. Name feelings and reactions. Name simple concepts (e.g., how does it look, feel, taste, sound, move?). Name them all day long, in as many situations as you can find.

(continued on page 3)

Try a sample list, based on how well you know your baby and your daily routine. The first item is an example.



Teddy Bear

Baby wakes up and looks:

"There's Teddy Bear."

Baby grabs bear.

"Hug Teddy Bear."

"You love Teddy Bear."

Baby spills milk on the bear.

"Teddy Bear is wet."(sniff the bear)

"Teddy Bear smells like milk"



Shoes

Baby grabs own shoe.

"There's your shoe!"

Baby struggles to get it off.

"You want the shoe off? Pull!"

Shoe comes off.

"You got your shoe off!!"



Peaches at lunch

Baby takes a bite. *Possible responses:*

a) Mmmm. Peaches are good.

b) You like peaches.

c) you eat peaches. Yummy.)

Baby opens mouth for more. *Possible responses:*

a) more peaches.

b) oh, another bite of peaches.

c) here come the peaches. You want more.

Baby turns away. *Possible responses:*

a) no more peaches? you are full?

b) one more bite. Peaches are good.

c) done with peaches? okay.