

Language & Learning

Learning From My Family

Learning Polite Conventions

We make friends and become part of the community by being polite. Almost the first social communication a baby learns is greeting. When you go to the crib to get your baby up in the morning, you often get a big smile. You probably respond with a smile and “Good morning,” or “Hi there.” You use your baby’s name. You pick your baby up. Babies learn from our models. At the beginning, if we use similar greetings every day, they become part of a greeting routine. Soon, we are waiting for a voice, or a wave, or a formal word or sign, encouraging the baby to respond with more than the smile. Don’t rush that moment, but leave the opportunity for it in your routine. Later, you greet other people when they arrive. Your baby sees that you exchange that routine with others, too. Gradually, as your baby becomes a little older, you can encourage greeting exchanges with others. Greetings are important as a social tool. We start our communications with “Hi, how are you?” We use people’s names when we greet them. Our babies who are deaf and hard of hearing need to be aware that they should greet others, too.

Two other early kinds of polite conversation are appreciation and apology. The process of learning “Thank you” and “Excuse me,” or “I’m sorry,” is very much like learning to greet people. Your baby sees or hears you, learns from the interactions between the two of you, and learns from seeing you communicate with other people. You want to be sure that your baby can connect what you are saying with what is happening at the time, so that the reasons for using social language are clear.

Even before your baby is ready to say “Hi,” or “Thank you,” he will be able to wave “Bye-bye.” Saying goodbye is one of the first social routines that babies learn. Like any parents, you will find yourselves saying, “Say bye-bye to Grandma (or Aunt Nancy, or your teacher)”. The gesture that we use to say goodbye is one that any baby can see and copy.

Social language has a lot to do with how people respond to us in the community. Keep your baby aware of your social language and use social routines. Make sure that you use your chosen communication modality (such as sign, speech or cues) so that your baby understands as much as possible about what is happening.