

Especially for practitioners working with infants! 

Child-Directed Speech Dictionary

 *Vocalizing and Listening*

Adults in most parts of the world speak to infants differently than they do others. When talking to babies they use high-pitched and elongated words in an exaggerated manner with lots of facial expressiveness. This kind of speech is called child-directed speech, parentese, motherese, or baby talk. This practice guide dictionary gives examples of some of the more common words used in child-directed speech. Child-directed speech can help the children in your care have an easier time understanding and attending to spoken language.

What is the practice?

Speaking parentese is a special way of being engaged in conversations with an infant. It will have the child attentively looking at, smiling, and talking back to you. Try talking to an infant in short, repetitive sentences. Change the pitch of your voice and make funny faces. This is about all it will take to get your little ones to learn the joys of conversation. Help the children in your care discover the pleasures of talking, interacting with, and having fun with people. Parentese works best when it is used along with normal adult speech.

What does the practice look like?

Picture a child lying on her back on a blanket on the floor and her mother leaning over her. The mother starts a conversation by saying, "Hellooooo, my sweeeetie. How is my baaaabeeeee today?" She says this while smiling at her daughter and making exaggerated faces. She moves closer and closer to her baby's face while talking. "You are sooooo cuuute," Mom coos. "Are you Mama's biiiig giirrl?" Encouraging parents to use parentese with their infants is one way to increase and improve talking between baby and parent.



How do you do the practice?

Here is a list of some of the words and sayings that are often used as part of speaking parentese. However, this is surely not a complete list. Search the Web using **parentese** or **motherese** for other examples of "baby talk."

Baba (bottle)	Jammies (pajamas)
Beddy-bye (go to sleep)	Kissy (kiss)
Blankie (blanket)	Nappy (take a nap)
Boo-boo (bruise or hurt)	Pee-pee (urinate)
Cutie (cute)	Poopy (soiled diaper)
Din-din (dinner)	Sippie (baby cup)
Doo-doo (feces)	Stinky (smelly)
Go bye-bye (leave or go somewhere)	Tee-tee (urinate)
Hiney (buttocks)	Tummy (stomach)
Icky (disgusting)	Uppie (pick up)
Itty-bitty (little or small)	Yucky (disgusting)
	Yum-yum (eat or meal time)

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does the child look intently at you when you speak parentese?
- Does she smile, laugh, and make noises when you are talking to her?
- Are you using more parentese in addition to standard adult speech?

Take a look at more speech dictionaries

Mommy-Daughter Chat

Sam is five months old and loves it when her mom talks to her. Her interventionist, Esme, suggests Sam sit facing her mom on Mom's lap or knees when they are talking. In this position Mom and daughter can see and hear each other clearly. Mom starts a conversation. She asks Sam in a sing-song voice, "How was your day? Did you do fun things?" Sam starts smiling and laughing right away while looking intently at her mother. Mom responds by saying, "You like it soooo much when Mama talks to you! You are my favorite little girl. You are sooo cuuute. You're Mama's sweetie baaabeeel!" Sam coos and babbles happily. Mom continues the conversation by talking to her daughter and mixing baby talk into the story.



Game of "Touch"

Andy, eight months old, and his caregiver, Ava, play a game of "Touch." The parentese Ava uses in this game excites Andy every time she changes his diaper. "Where are Andy's piggies? Where are Andy's piggies?" Ava asks. Andy starts kicking his legs in anticipation of his feet being tickled. Ava continues the game by asking, "Does Andy want a kissy? Does he want a kissy on his tumtum?" The more she talks to him, the more Andy seems to know what is coming next. He wiggles his body around, knowing that Ava is about to kiss and blow raspberries on his tummy. Every so often, she uses more exaggerated and expressive baby talk when speaking to Andy. This encourages Andy to initiate more play and signal Ava to continue playing the game.

Parentese

Lauren is 9 months old and has some visual difficulties. This makes it very important for her to listen closely to all that is going on around her. Lauren's home visitor, Vince, encourages Lauren's parents to make her auditory environment as stimulating as possible. He suggests talking to her about everything that goes on. Each parent has developed a different way of using baby talk with Lauren based on her responses. Her dad uses do-do, icky, pee-you, poo-poo and other parentese each time he changes Lauren's diaper. The fun, exaggerated style of talking encourages Lauren to smile, laugh, and talk back to her dad. Mom uses her set of parentese words during Lauren's mealtimes. Lauren especially likes it when her mother asks, "Do you want din-din or your sippy?" She has learned that reaching for either will have Mom feed her or give her a drink.

