

Especially for parents of infants! 

Oohs and Aahs

 *Vocalizing and Listening*

Language development moves along at full speed when babies have fun-filled babbling and cooing “talks” with their parents.

What is the practice?

This practice guide includes ways to get your infant to make more sounds. Infants who use cooing sounds to “talk” are able to start and continue interaction and play with people. Cooing includes vowel sounds such as *ah*, *ooh*, *eee*, *uh*, *ah-ee*, and the like.



What does the practice look like?

Face-to-face interactions between you and your baby are the best times to work on increasing infant vocalizations. Any play activity is likely to encourage cooing and babbling. Repeat or imitate the sounds your infant makes. It won't take long for him to learn that anytime he makes sounds, you will repeat the sounds he says.

How do you do the practice?

Follow these simple steps to get your infant to use his voice more and more.

- Start by placing your child in a comfortable position. Very young infants often like lying on their backs or being held in your lap while looking up at you.
- Talk to your infant while gently tickling his tummy or neck. Touching your infant's mouth with light pats sometimes will get him to make sounds.
- Any time your infant makes a sound, imitate what he says. At first the sound you say should match or be about the same as the sound he makes. It is best to wait until your child is finished “talking” before imitating his sounds.
- Try changing the sounds you use to imitate or repeat what your infant has said. If he says “ah,” you might say “ah goo.” Changing the sounds is likely to capture his interest.
- Be sure to show your infant that sound play is fun. Smile, laugh, and show him that you're excited by the sounds he makes. If you are enjoying the interaction, he will likely get excited.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does your child repeat the sounds you imitate?
- Is your infant using different kinds of cooing sounds?
- Does your infant get more and more excited while playing sound games?

Take a look at more fun with baby “talk”

Imitation

Alexis is 7 months old. She knows that it is time to play whenever her father places her on her back on a favorite blanket. Dad talks to Alexis and tries to get her to talk to him. Her father starts by asking, “Is my little girl going to talk to her daddy?” At the sound of his voice, Alexis begins to coo. Every time she makes a cooing sound, her dad waits for her to finish. He repeats the sounds to Alexis’s delight. Dad has learned that copying his daughter’s sounds gets her to “talk” more and more to him.



Repetition



Seven-month-old Tyler lies in his crib after waking up. He likes to just lie there and make different sounds. He also tries to make new sounds. His routine now includes **ah, ah-ha, eee, ooh,** and **ohh-goo**. Tyler is also trying to make sounds like blowing raspberries. Mom waits until he is “talking away” before going in to pick him up. Before Tyler can see her, she repeats whatever sounds he happens to be making. This is a game that Tyler and his mother have been playing for some time. He smiles and laughs whenever he hears her voice. Mom moves into Tyler’s line of vision and says, “You hear Mommy, don’t you?” This gets him to make even more sounds. Mom tries saying something just a little different to get him to try the new sound. He does not always get it just right, but he loves this tit-for-tat between himself and his mom.

Amp It Up!

It is sometimes hard for 6-month-old Cindy to make sounds loud enough for her parents to hear. Her dad has found a simple way for Cindy to be heard. He uses a child’s microphone and audio player/amplifier to “turn up the volume.” The first time Cindy heard her own cooing sounds “loud and clear” she was startled. But now she starts cooing whenever Dad brings out the microphone. He imitates Cindy and sometimes makes other sounds as they go back and forth “talking” to each other. Cindy is now able to make louder sounds since she has started her own version of karaoke!



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Babble On

Vocalizing and Listening

Not long after infants make a lot of cooing sounds, they start to try to make babbling sounds. Making the same consonants over and over (*ba-ba-ba, da-da-da, ga-ga-ga, ma-ma-ma-ma*) is called babbling. As infants get good at babbling, they often try putting different sounds together (*da-ga-ba, ba-mi-ma*).

What is the practice?

This practice simply involves repeating your infant's babbling sounds as part of your everyday play with her. Your baby will learn that she can get you to respond to what she is saying. While talking to your child, start to change the sounds you make after her babbling. This will catch her interest and get her to try new sounds. You can do this just about anytime when your child is awake and alert



What does the practice look like?

A father holds his son so that they're facing each other. Dad lifts his son and asks, "How is my little man doing today? Can you say hello to Da-da?" Any time his son makes a sound, Dad repeats it and waits to see what his son does next. They go back and forth "talking" to each other. Dad changes how he responds to see what his son will do. When Dad says something different, his son looks at him and tries his hardest to copy Dad's sounds.

How do you do the practice?

Here are some simple ways to get your baby to babble and to try to make new babbling sounds.

- Getting your child to babble and "talk" to you is more likely to happen during face-to-face interactions.
- Vocal play activities should be ones that your child enjoys and finds interesting. The idea is to create a situation where vocal play occurs naturally.
- Imitate your child any time she makes babbling sounds or any other sounds.
- Make a babbling sound that your child already makes to see if she will repeat it. Lap games and vocal play activities are great times to try this.
- Introduce new babbling sounds into parent-baby play and watch to see what your child does. Imitate what she says and then repeat any new sounds she makes.
- Have fun! Show your enjoyment! The more your child sees your pleasure, the more likely she will feel excited too.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does your child repeat the sounds that you both make?
- Does your child try to make new babbling sounds?
- Does your child use babbling sounds to get your attention?

Take a look at more of baby's babbling fun

Say It Again, Daddy!

Taylor and her father are playing together on the floor with her favorite toys and stuffed animals. Dad describes what 8-month-old Taylor is doing. He talks to her about all that is going on. Dad uses animal sounds like *baa-baa* and *moo-moo* while playing with toy animals. He asks Taylor to say the sounds. She tries her best to repeat what her dad says. Whatever she says (for example, *maa-maa* for *moo-moo*), her father repeats the sounds. This gets Taylor to say it again. This back-and-forth play is a favorite activity for Taylor. She watches, listens, and tries to repeat the sounds her dad makes.



Happy Talk!

A few months have passed since 14-month-old Brynna has learned to say *da-da*, *ga-ga*, *ba-ba*, and other babbling sounds. She loves to just lie in her crib after waking, repeating everything she can say over and over. Brynna's mother plays a sound game with her when she goes into her room to pick her up. She looks at Brynna and says, "Has Brynna been talking again? What are you saying?" This excites her baby and she starts babbling again. Mom repeats the sounds while talking about what her daughter is doing. ("You are so good at saying *ba-ba*. Say *ba-ba* again!") After three or four back-and-forth bouts of talking, Mom asks, "Can you say *ga-ga*, *ga-ga*?" Brynna tries to repeat the sounds. She doesn't always get it right, but she seems pleased with her effort.

Play Prompts Babbling

Amber is 9 months old. Her mother has found fun ways to help her daughter babble as part of games they play together. Amber has difficulties with muscle strength and especially her facial muscles which makes it hard for her to make sounds. Mom has solved this problem by helping her daughter to babble on! One game they play is *Mouth Patting*. Mom gently pats Amber's mouth while saying *ma-ma-ma* or some other babbling sound. This gets her daughter to make the same or similar sounds each time her mouth is patted. When Mom stops, Amber gets excited and starts moving her lips to tell Mom to "do it again." Amber's mother tries different babbling sounds each time the game is played. Her daughter does her best to repeat the sounds.



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Sights and Sounds

Vocalizing and Listening

Infants become familiar with sounds and words by hearing the sounds of people, animals, and objects. They also become familiar with sounds by making lots of noise! This practice guide includes some ways to help your baby become familiar with different sounds.

What is the practice?

Give your child opportunities to hear lots of sounds as part of parent-child play. Imagine a mother showing her child a toy bumble bee. Making sounds like a bee buzzing can help her baby become familiar with sound. The more a child hears the sounds of different toys and objects, the more she will notice if the sounds are the same or different.

What does the practice look like?

An infant is sitting on the floor with her mother. The mother shows her child a stuffed kitten and mimics the animal sound. “Meow!” She slowly moves the toy kitten toward the baby. Mom repeats the meowing sound until the toy “tickles” the child’s tummy or neck. Mom waits for her baby to vocalize, smile, or laugh. She knows these are signs that she wants to play the game again. Mom repeats the game anytime her baby vocalizes, smiles, or laughs at her.



How do you do the practice?

- Start by finding three or four objects or toys that are familiar to your baby. Soft toys like favorite stuffed animals often work best.
- Show your child a toy and make the sound that goes with the toy. Say “Oink, oink” while showing your child a toy pig.
- Make the toy seem to dance or move. Repeat the animal sound and move the toy toward your child to touch him with the toy. Pretend to have the toy kiss him. Make it fun!
- Repeat the game, but wait until your child gives you some sign that he wants to play again. Your child will probably look at you and make a sound to get you to do it again.
- Play with different sounds and different toys. Vary where you tickle or kiss your baby to vary the game.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does your child get excited and enjoy the game?
- Does your child vocalize more often to get you to continue the game?
- Does your child seem to know that you are about to have the toy tickle or kiss her?

Take a look at more sights and sounds

Animal Hand Puppets

Eight-week-old Joshua especially enjoys seeing animals while out on neighborhood strolls with his mother. Mom has noticed that Joshua listens intently to whatever sounds the animals make. She uses this interest to play sound and word games with animal hand puppets to get Joshua to “talk.” He especially likes dog, cat, and cow puppets. Joshua’s mother has the puppets “talk” to him, saying things like “You are such a big boy. Do you want to play a game with me?” She watches for a sign that her son wants to play with a puppet. She then says the animal sound as she makes the puppet dance on Joshua’s tummy. She moves the puppet toward his face as she makes the animal sound a little louder and more exaggerated. The game ends by having the puppet pretend to nibble the baby’s nose. When his mother picks up another puppet, Joshua starts making sounds as if he is talking to the puppet.



Play Sounds

Sarah is 9 months old. She and her dad play a game where he “makes up” sounds for things Sarah likes to do. Banging wooden spoons on pots. Clapping blocks together. Hitting a drum. These are just a few of Sarah’s favorite pastimes. Her father says “bang-bang” when she is hitting pots. “Click-clack” when she plays with blocks. “Boom-boom” when she pounds on a drum. Sarah watches her father intently as they both “do their thing.” She tries hard to repeat the sounds her father makes. Sarah even looks to see what Dad will say next when she is trying different activities. She even tries to “make up” sounds on her own.

Talking Froggy

Caleb is 8 months old. He has a favorite stuffed frog that chirps “Rib-bit!” The toy makes other frog sounds when squeezed. Caleb doesn’t have the strength to squeeze the frog by himself. His mother still uses the frog to play a game with Caleb. The game gets him to make all kinds of sounds to have Mom squeeze “Froggy” for him. Mom starts the game by asking, “Where is Froggy? Is he sleeping?” Caleb gets excited. He starts making cooing sounds to tell Mom he wants to see his toy frog. Mom brings the stuffed animal into view and says, “Say hello to Froggy.” Caleb waves his arms and makes a loud squealing sound. Mom squeezes the frog. It makes a *ribbit* sound. The game continues with Mom asking Caleb different questions. Each time Caleb “answers,” Mom squeezes the toy frog to make yet another sound.



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Feeding Frenzy!

Vocalizing and Listening

Meals can be especially good times to have “chats” between yourself and your young child. This handout includes ideas for how meals are chances for your child to listen, babble, and try out new words. They are also times to have your-turn/my-turn “talks” between you and your child.

What is the practice?

Talk to your baby and encourage him to “sound off” and gesture to you while eating. Family meals can be enjoyable times for listening and communicating. Your most successful “talks” might happen when you are feeding your child foods he especially likes. The more relaxing and enjoyable the activity, the more it will be a great time for talking.



What does the practice look like?

Imagine a hungry infant seated in a highchair or an infant seat. The parent says to the child, “It’s time to eat!” The baby becomes excited and opens his mouth. The parent asks, “Do you want some (child’s favorite food)?” The baby’s excitement grows. The parent feeds him while saying, “Yum, yum, good!” The back-and-forth flow of feeding time is filled with talking, babbling, gesturing, and lots of fun.

How do you do the practice?

Help your child become a “talking” partner. When you talk to your child, watch for how she tells you she is listening. You’ll be giving her chances to tell you things like “I want more.” “This tastes yummy.” “Talk to me some more.” And “This is fun” in whatever way she is able. The ways your child takes part in back-and-forth communication will depend on her age and interests.

- This activity works best when your child is hungry. Be attentive to your infant’s signals and signs that she wants to be fed.
- The activity also works best when you and your child are facing each other. Placing your child in a highchair, infant seat, or any other seat where he is at ease is important. If needed, use pillows or rolled towels to help him sit upright.
- Talk to your child in short sentences like, “It’s time to eat” or “I have your favorite food.” Try “Okay! It’s chow time.” Ask simple questions: “Are you ready to eat?” “Do you want more oatmeal?” The idea is to get your child excited about meal times.
- Pay attention to whatever your child does to “tell” you he wants more or wants your attention. Respond to any and all things your child does to get you to continue mealtime chit-chat. This might include gestures, sounds, or movements.
- Make the interaction fun and enjoyable. Don’t be afraid to play feeding games like using a spoon as a toy airplane!

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does your child tell you he wants to be fed by opening his mouth?
- Does your child communicate by getting excited or reaching out toward the food or spoon?
- Does your child vocalize to try to get your attention?

Take a look at back-and-forth fun at mealtimes

Favorite Food

If 8-month-old Ashley had her way, she would only eat applesauce! She bubbles with joy whenever she sees her favorite food. She coos, wiggles, and squeals with delight. Her mom knows that Ashley will “talk up a storm” during this meal. Ashley’s mom exclaims, “I have your favorite food! Applesauce!” Ashley immediately makes loud squeals and babbling. Mom puts Ashley in her highchair and says, “Open up. Here it comes!” Without hesitation, Ashley strains forward to taste her first mouthful. “You like that, don’t you?” her mother asks. Mealtimes turn into back-and-forth exchanges between mother and daughter. They each play their part during this happy time together.

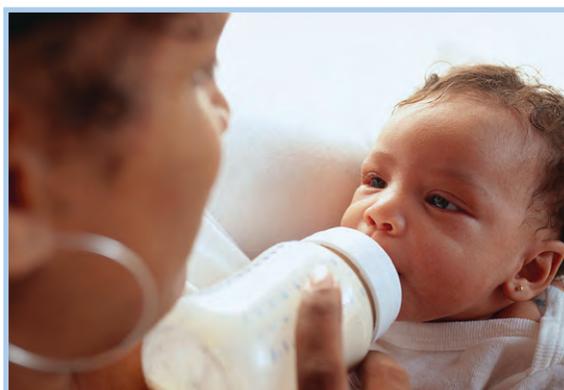


Food and Togetherness

Six-month-old Nathan loves to eat. He’ll let you know in no uncertain way that he is hungry! Dad feeds Nathan while his son is in an infant seat placed on the kitchen table. Dad puts some rice cereal on a spoon and begins feeding Nathan. He asks, “Do you like that? Do you want more?” Nathan “says” yes by shaking his arms and moving his lips. Dad responds, “Let’s try some green beans. What do you think?” Next he says, “What about another bite? Is that a yes?” Dad continues asking Nathan questions and describing what he is doing. He involves his son in a your-turn/my-turn exchange throughout the meal. It is clear that Nathan not only likes his food but very much enjoys this father-and-son time together.

I’m Ready for More!

Three-month-old Nicole has had difficulties drinking from a bottle ever since she was born. Mom received advice from a professional who has helped her increase Nicole’s liquid intake. Mom has noticed that Nicole started looking at her bottle or at her mom while being fed. Mom started experimenting with feeding time to see if she could make it more fun and enjoyable for Nicole. With the baby nestled in her arms, Mom says, “It’s time for your bottle! Are you ready to eat?” Any time Nicole looks at the bottle or at Mom, she puts the nipple in her daughter’s mouth. After about four or five sucks, Mom removes the nipple and says, “That was good! Do you want more?” Nicole begins to make sucking movements and Mom again puts the nipple in the baby’s mouth. This has turned into a back-and-forth, your-turn/my-turn game. Nicole has figured out that looking, sucking, and making sounds gets Mom to give her more to drink.



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Talk to Me...in Parentese!

 *Vocalizing and Listening*

It is never too early to have back-and-forth chats with your baby. Talking to little ones introduces them to the world of voices, sounds, and words. These earliest parent-infant “talks” help babies learn how to communicate with others.

What is the practice?

Babies love to hear the voices of familiar people. They “tune in” to what they hear. They especially get excited when they are spoken to in interesting ways. Talking to infants using both adult speech and “baby talk” can be especially interesting to little ones. Baby talk is sometimes called *Parentese* or *Motherese*. It is a type of speech where an adult talks to a child in an exaggerated and repetitive way. Parentese will make your baby look at you and make all kinds of coos and babbles. Check out the Parentese Dictionary practice guide for more ideas about using baby talk.



What does the practice look like?

Any time you and your infant are together is a fine time for talking. Imagine a father holding an infant in his arms. While the baby gazes at his father, Dad starts “talking” to him: “You see Daddy, don’t you?” The baby begins to wiggle, showing his excitement. “You hear me talking to you,” Dad continues. The baby gets even more excited. Then Dad adds some baby talk to what he is saying. In a slow and exaggerated manner, Dad croons: “Does my little Thomas hear me talking? Tom-Tom is so, soooo cuuute!”

How do you do the practice?

- Your child should be in a comfortable position where you can easily look at each other. Hold your baby in your arms. Or place him face-up stretched out on your legs.
- Start by saying anything that captures your infant’s attention (for example: “How is [child’s name] today?”) When it is mealtime, you can say something like, “It’s time for [child’s name] to eat. Are you hungry?” It is best to use words that describe what you and your child are doing together.
- Follow your child’s lead. Watch for signs or signals that tell you your infant hears or is paying attention to your voice. Some infants get “bright-eyed.” Others wiggle with excitement.
- Add baby talk to what you are saying: “(Child’s name) is soooo cuuute. (Child’s name) is such a preeetty baaaby!” Speak softly and slowly. Then start talking in a manner that exaggerates the sounds in the words.
- Go back and forth between adult speech and baby talk as you chat with your child. Your baby will “tune in” more to what is being said. She might even become more involved by trying to talk to you.
- Your baby doesn’t need to understand what you are saying. The main idea is to get him involved in the conversation.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does your child pay close attention to your face and mouth?
- Does your child seem to know the difference between adult speech and baby talk?
- Does your child vocalize and get excited when you use baby talk?

Take a look at more fun with baby talk

Bottle-Time Parentese

Six-month-old Zachary is about to be given a bottle of water. He expects that his mother will talk to him in a *funny* way! Mom holds Zachary in her arms so that they can look at each other. "Is Zach hungry?" she asks. Zachary looks up at his mother while opening his mouth. Mom continues speaking in a high-pitched, sing-song voice, saying, "Yum, yum, yummy! You are veeery thirsty! Zach loves his *ba-ba* doesn't he?" Anytime Mom uses baby talk, Zachary's eyes brighten and he blows bubbles with his water! The whole bottle experience is filled with a happy, back-and-forth talking between Zach and his mom.



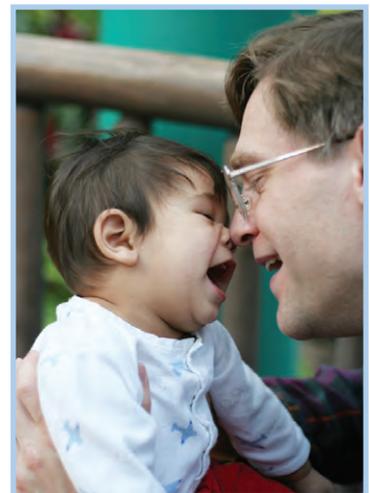
High Excitement



Anthony's father is putting his 8-month-old son in the stroller seat for a walk to the store. "Are we getting ready to *go bye-bye*?" he says. Excitement spreads all over the baby from head to toe! Anthony smiles, vocalizes, and shakes all over. Dad says, "We are going to the store to get Anthony some food for *din-din*. What should we get?" Anthony joins in and starts vocalizing to his dad. In a high-pitched voice, Dad says, "You are such a *haaandsome* little boy! Daddy loves you *soooo, soooo* much!" Anthony loves it when his father talks to him this way. The more animated and exaggerated his dad's voice and expression, the more Anthony "talks" back.

Exaggeration Power

Evan is 7 months old and has a hearing loss. His father has a fun way to get Evan to hang on to every sound and sign he makes. He does it most any time (meals, bath, nap, play, etc.). Evan's father talks to him in a high-pitched, exaggerated voice paired with big, expressive sign language. One of Evan's favorite activities is outdoor play because his father acts so silly! Dad makes slow, exaggerated mouth movements when he is playing in the yard with Evan. "Up in the tree house!" Dad says as he signs *up* and opens his mouth wide. Evan opens his mouth as much as he can. Both father and son are "hooked" on each other's every movement!



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Parentese Dictionary

Vocalizing and Listening

Most parents and adults use high-pitched voices and very expressive faces when they talk to babies. They also tend to stretch out their words. This kind of speech is called *Parentese*. It is also called *Motherese*, *child-directed speech*, or *baby talk*.

What is the practice?

Speaking Parentese is a way to have “conversations” with an infant. Parentese will encourage a child to look at you closely, smile at you, and talk back to you. Talk to your infant using short, repetitive words and sentences. Vary the pitch of your voice to get your child’s attention. Making funny faces while using Parentese will get your little one to learn the joys of talking. She will learn to love interacting and having fun with you. Parentese works best when it is mixed in with normal adult speech.

What does the practice look like?

Imagine a child lying on her back on a blanket on the floor with her mother leaning over her. The mother says, “Hel-loooo, my sweeeetie. How is my baaaabeeeee today?” She smiles at her daughter, makes dramatic facial movements, and moves closer and closer to her baby’s face. She says, “You are soooo cuuute. Are you mama’s biig giirr?”

How do you do the practice?

Here are some “cutsie” words and sayings that are often used while speaking Parentese. Search the Web using *Parentese* or *Motherese* for other kinds 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 (dirty diaper)
Doo-doo (feces)	Sippie (baby cup)
Din-din (dinner)	Stinky (smelly)
Go bye-bye (leave or go somewhere)	Tee-tee (urinate)
Hiney (buttocks)	Tummy (stomach)
Icky (disgusting)	Upsie (pick-up)
Itty-bitty (little or small)	Yucky (disgusting)
	Yum-yum (eat or meal time)



How do you know the practice worked?

- Does your child look closely at you when you speak Parentese?
- Does she smile, laugh, and get excited when you are talking to her?
- Is she vocalizing more when you are talking?

Take a look at more *Parentese* in action

Delightful "Mommy Talk"

Four-month-old Lilah loves it when her mother talks to her. Her favorite position is sitting face-to-face on Mommy's knees. Mom starts by asking Lilah: "How was your day? Did you get to do fun things?" Lilah almost immediately starts smiling and laughing while looking intently at her mother. Mom responds by saying, "You like it soooo much when Momma talks to you. You are Momma's favorite little girl. You are soooo cuuute. You're Momma's sweeeet baaaabeeeee!" Lilah coos and babbles as her mother continues talking to her daughter and sometimes using "baby talk."



Tummy Talk

Andrew is 7 months old. His mother plays a game of **Touch** where her talking Parentese excites her son every time she talks silly. "Where are Andy's piggies? Where are Andy's piggies?" Mom asks. Andy starts kicking his legs to have his feet tickled. Mom continues by asking, "Does Andy want a kissy? Does he want a kissy on his tumtum?" The more she talks to him, the more he seems to know what is going to happen. His mother kisses him and blows raspberries on his belly while speaking Parentese. She sometimes uses exaggerated baby talk to get her son to start or continue to play the game.

Prime Times for Parentese!

Lauren has visual difficulties. She listens intently to whatever her mother or father says to her. Each parent has a particular way of using baby talk with 8-month-old Lauren. She responds to each with delight! Her father uses **doo-doo**, **icky**, **pee-yoo**, **poo-poo** and other Parentese each time he changes Lauren's diaper. The baby talk is used in a fun, expressive, and exaggerated way. This gets Lauren to smile, laugh, and talk back to her dad. Mom has some Parentese expressions for 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 get Mom to feed her or give her a drink.

