

Especially for parents of infants!

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.

