

Especially for practitioners working with infants! 

Animal Sound Games

Vocalizing and Listening

Infants become familiar with sounds and words by hearing and associating different sounds with people, animals, and objects. This helps get them ready for listening to and understanding spoken language. This practice guide includes some techniques you can use with babies and their families to familiarize them with different sounds.

What is the practice?

This practice uses the sounds of animals, toys, and other objects to provide children opportunities to hear sounds during adult-child play. The sounds are used to provide feedback in response to the child making any kind of vocalization. For example, when playing with a stuffed bee, make a buzzing sound when the child produces any excited response. The more a child hears the sounds “that go with” different toys and objects, the more she will begin to notice how sounds are similar and different.

What does the practice look like?

An infant is sitting on his mother’s lap. The mother shows her child a stuffed animal and makes the animal sound. The stuffed animal is slowly moved toward the child. The sound of the animal is repeated until it “tickles” the child’s tummy or neck. The mother waits until the child vocalizes, smiles, laughs, or shows some indication that he wants to play the game again. The mom repeats the game any time her son vocalizes, smiles, or laughs at her.

How do you do the practice?

- Start by asking the parent to identify three or four objects or toys that are familiar to the child. Soft toys like favorite stuffed animals often work best.
- Show the child a toy and make the sound associated with the toy. (For example, say “oink, oink” while showing the child a toy pig.)
- Make the toy seem to dance or move. Repeat the animal sound over and over. Move the toy toward the child and touch her with it (pretending to have the pig kiss her, for example). Make it fun!
- Repeat the game, but wait until the child gives some sign that she wants to play again. (For example, if she looks at you and makes a sound—any sound).
- Try different sounds and different toys. Vary where you “tickle” or “kiss” the child to make the game more interesting.



How do you know the practice worked?

- Does the child get excited and enjoy the game?
- Does the child vocalize more often to get others to continue the game?
- Does the child anticipate having the toy tickle or kiss her?

Take a look at more fun with animal sounds

Puppet Power

Four-month-old Joshua especially enjoys seeing animals while out and about with his mother. Mara, his home visitor, has noticed that he listens intently to whatever sounds the animals make. She uses this interest to play sound and word games with Joshua and his mom. They use animal hand puppets to get Joshua to “talk.” He especially likes dog, cat, and cow puppets. Mara has the puppets talk to Joshua, saying things like “You are a big boy. Do you want to play with me?” She watches for a sign or signal that he wants to play with a puppet. Mara starts saying the animal sound as she makes the puppet dance on Joshua’s tummy. She then gives the puppet to Mom who starts having it walk toward Josh’s face. As the puppet gets closer, Mom makes the animal sound a little louder and in a more pronounced and exaggerated way. The game ends by having the puppet pretend to nibble on Josh’s nose. As soon as Mom puts on another puppet, Josh starts making sounds as if he is talking to the puppet.



Sound Words

Sarah is a caregiver in a class of 6- to 12-month-old infants. She plays a game where she “makes up” sounds for different things the babies like to do. Banging wooden spoons on pots, banging blocks together, and hitting on a drum are a few of the children’s favorite activities. Sarah puts the “noisemakers” on a low shelf within easy reach of the children. Whenever a child begins playing with one, Sarah makes appropriate sounds. She says “Bang-bang” when someone hits the pots, “clank-clank” when they play with blocks, and “boom-boom” when they pound a drum. The children watch Sarah intently as she talks for the toys and they attempt to repeat her sounds. Some of the older children have begun saying the sounds themselves, and for others, while they are playing with the noisemaking toys.

The Cat’s Meow

Eight-month-old Mandy has a favorite stuffed cat that meows and makes other cat sounds when it is squeezed. She is not able to squeeze the cat herself because she does not have the strength to do so. Her early interventionist helps her mother use the cat to engage Mandy in a game. Mandy makes all kinds of sounds so Mom will squeeze her “kitty-cat” for her. Mom starts the game by asking Mandy, “Where’s the kitty-cat? Is she sleeping?” This gets Mandy excited and she starts making cooing sounds. Mom and the early interventionist know this means Mandy wants to see her cat. Mom brings the stuffed animal into view and asks her daughter to “say ‘hello’ to kitty.” Mandy waves her arms and makes a loud squealing sound. Mom squeezes the cat to make a meow sound. The game continues by Mom asking Mandy different questions. Each time she “answers,” Mom squeezes the cat to make yet another sound.

