

Especially for practitioners working with young children! 

Child-Directed Speech Dictionary

 *Vocalizing and Listening*

Adults in most parts of the world talk to infants using 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 includes examples of some of the more commonly used child-directed speech that can help the children in your care have an easier time understanding and paying attention to spoken language.

What is the practice?

Speaking *parentese* is a way of engaging in conversations with an infant that will have the child attentively looking at, smiling, and talking back to you. Talking to an infant in short, repetitive sentences while varying the pitch of your voice and making funny facial expressions is about all it will take to get your little ones to learn the joys of talking, interacting with, and having fun with interesting people. *Parentese* works best when it is used along with normal adult speech.

What does the practice look like?

Imagine 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, "Helloooo, my sweeetie. How is my baaaabeeeee today?" She says this while smiling at her daughter, making exaggerated facial movements, and moving closer and closer to her baby's face. "You are soooo cuuute," Mom coos. "Are you Mama's blllll giiirr!?" Encouraging parents to use *parentese* with their infants is one way to increase and improve communication between baby and parent.



How do you do the practice?

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

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

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does the child look intently at you when you speak *parentese*?
- Does she smile, laugh, and vocalize when you are talking to her?
- Have you increased your use of *parentese* in addition to standard adult speech?

Take a look at more speech dictionaries

Mommy-Daughter Chat

Five-month-old Samantha loves it when her mother talks to her. Her home visitor, Esme, suggests that a good position for Samantha is facing and looking directly at her mom while seated on mom's lap or knees. In this position they can see and hear each other clearly with good eye contact. Mom starts a conversation by asking Sam in a sing-song voice, "How was your day? Did you do fun things?" Sam immediately starts smiling and laughing while looking intently at her mother. Mom responds by saying, "You like it soooo much when Ma-ma talks to you! You are my favorite little girl. You are sooo cuuute. You're Mama's sweetie baaabeeel!" Sam coos and babbles as Mom continues the conversation by talking to her daughter and mixing baby talk into the story.



Game of "Touch"

Eight-month-old Andrew and his caregiver, Ava, play a game of "Touch" where her talking *parentese* excites Andrew 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 having his feet tickled. Ava continues by asking, "Does Andy want a kissy? Does he want a kissy on his tumtum?" The more she talks to him, the more Andrew seems to know that Ava is going to kiss his stomach and blow raspberries on his tummy. Every so often, she uses more exaggerated and expressive baby talk to encourage Andrew's initiating or getting her to continue to play the game.

Parentese

Nine-month-old Lauren's visual difficulties make it very important for her to listen closely to everything in her environment. Her early interventionist, Vincent, has encouraged Lauren's parents to make her auditory environment as stimulating as possible by talking to her about everything that goes on. Each parent has developed their own way of using baby talk with Lauren based on her responses. Her father 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 has her collection of *parentese* 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 have Mom feed her or give her a drink.

