

*Especially for practitioners working with young children!* 

# Infant Babbling Activities

*Vocalizing and Listening*

Not long after infants have learned to produce lots of cooing sounds, they start to experiment with babbling sounds. Babbling includes the production of the same consonants over and over (*ba-ba-ba, da-da-da, ga-ga-ga, ma-ma-ma*). As infants get good at babbling, they often experiment with putting combinations of sounds together (*da-ga-ba, ba-mi-ma*).

## What is the practice?

This practice simply involves imitating and repeating an infant's babbling sounds as part of interacting and playing with a child. Once the child realizes that she can get you to be responsive to what she is saying, you can start to vary the sounds she makes in response to her babbling to capture her interest and to get her to try different sounds.

## What does the practice look like?

A caregiver has a little girl seated on her lap facing her. The caregiver is holding onto the child's hand and asks "How is my little girl doing today? Can you say hello?" Anytime the little girl makes a babbling sound or any other kind of sound, the caregiver repeats it and waits to see what the girl will do and say. They go back and forth talking to each other, and every once in a while the caregiver changes how she responds to see what the child will do. When the caregiver's response is different, the little girl looks intently at her and tries to make the new sounds.



## How do you do the practice?

Here are some simple things you can try to get children in your care to babble more and more and to try to make different babbling sounds.

- Encouraging the child to babble and "talk to you" is more likely to happen during face-to-face interactions between you and the child.
- Vocal play activities should be ones that the child enjoys and finds interesting. The idea is to create a situation where vocalizing occurs naturally.
- Any time the child makes a babbling sound or any other kind of sound, imitate what she says.
- As part of vocal play, use a babbling sound that the child already can make to see if she will repeat the sound. Lap games and vocal play activities generally work best.
- Every once in a while, introduce new babbling sounds into the play activity and watch to see what the child does. Imitate what she says and then repeat the new sound she has made.
- Make the activity as fun and enjoyable as possible. The more the child sees that you are excited, the more she will likely do the same.

## How do you know the practice worked?

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

# Take a look at more fun babbling activities

## *Puppets and Papa*

Eight-month-old Taylor and her father are playing together on the floor with her favorite toys and stuffed animals. Shira, Taylor's home visitor, encourages Dad to describe what Taylor is doing and engage his daughter in "conversations" about all that is going on, even though Taylor is too young to understand all the words. Dad uses animal sounds like *baa-baa* and *moo-moo* as part of playing with toy animals, and he asks Taylor to say the sounds. She tries her best to repeat what her dad said, but no matter what she says (e.g., *me-me* for *moo-moo*), her father repeats the sounds, which gets Taylor to "say it again." These little exchanges have become a favorite activity for Taylor who watches, listens, and tries to repeat the sounds her dad says.



## *Babbling Back and Forth*

It has been a couple of months since Riley has learned to say *da-da*, *ga-ga*, *ba-ba*, and other babbling sounds. She loves to just lie in her crib after waking up from a nap at day care and go through everything she can say over and over! Her teacher, Pilar, plays a sound game with her when she picks Riley up. Pilar looks at Riley and asks, "Has Riley been talking again? What have you been saying?" This gets Riley excited and she starts babbling again. Pilar repeats the sounds while talking to and describing what Riley is doing. ("You are so good at saying *ba-ba*. Say *ba-ba* again!") After about three or four back-and-forth bouts of talking, Pilar asks, "Can you say *ga-ga*, *ga-ga*?" Riley tries to repeat what she has heard. She doesn't always get it right, but she certainly is pleased with her effort.

## *Mouth-Patting Game*

Anton's early interventionist, Hailey, has found some fun ways to help him make babbling sounds as part of games that Anton plays with his mom. Anton has difficulties with muscle strength, especially in his facial muscles, which makes it hard for him to make sounds. Hailey and Anton's mom have created some games to provide him with assistance and incentives to babble on! One game they play is *Mouth Patting*, which involves Mom gently patting Anton's mouth while saying *ma-ma-ma* or some other babbling sound. This gets her son to make the same or similar sounds each time his mouth is patted. When Mom stops, Anton gets excited and starts moving his lips to tell Mom to "do it again." Anton's mother tries different babbling sounds each time the game is played, and Anton does his best to repeat the sounds.

