

## **Babies Are Great Listeners**

*The University of Pittsburgh  
Office of Child Development*

Angela's friend spoke in whispers and shushed visitors to keep her baby's environment as quiet as possible. Angela, on the other hand, talks to her three-week-old daughter whenever she is awake, and plays music in the background in hopes of that her daughter will develop an appreciation of it.

The best environment for babies is found somewhere between silence and too much sound. A variety of sounds is good, but the best sounds your baby can hear are those you make yourself.

Babies seem particularly alert to human speech. They particularly enjoy "baby talk," short repetitive sentences spoken at slightly higher pitches.

Infants quickly become attuned to the voices of their parents. Within the first week of life – sometimes right out of the womb – your infant can recognize your voice as being familiar.

Angela noticed that her baby was more alert to her voice when the house was quiet. Babies as young as Angela's are easily distracted when other sounds compete for their attention. Now Angela makes sure she talks to her baby when the television is turned off.

Her daughter doesn't understand her words, of course, and she doesn't respond verbally. But the payoff will come when she starts to babble, which usually begins around four to six months of age.

Babbling babies don't speak words, even though it may sound like it. But they do learn which sounds are part of the language by hearing you talk.

If your baby is babbling, take advantage of this wonderful stage and have some fun. Try to get your baby to imitate a simple sound, such as "oh, oh." Say the first "oh" in a high pitch and the second in a lower pitch, then pause to let your baby "talk." Repeat this when your baby is paying attention to you and again after your baby has looked away. It might take a few days, but eventually your baby may say "oh, oh" to you.

Babies don't require much more than a moderate amount of distinctive sound stimulation. And the best sound your baby can hear is your voice. So talk, and respond to your baby's gurgles, sighs, and burps. Your friends might not be interested in hearing your life story. But your baby is a great listener.

*This column is written by Robert B. McCall, Ph.D., Co-Director of the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development and Professor of Psychology, and is provided as a public service by the Frank and Theresa Caplan Fund for Early Childhood Development and Parenting Education.*