

Essential Links

Parent Links
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A Good Start: Suggestions for Visual Conversations with Deaf and Hard of Hearing Babies and Toddlers

Section I: Engage in Frequent, Positive Communication with your Baby to Help Language Develop Faster

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A More In-Depth Look: Take time to respond to your baby's needs, to let your baby know by your smiles and your touch that he or she is loved. Play and loving contact are almost as important as food to babies!

All babies need to develop positive bonds with parents or caregivers. These bonds develop — regardless of the hearing status of the parents or the baby — when the parents respond to their babies' needs ([Lederberg & Mobley, 1990](#)). Because young babies can't really tell us what they need, we must observe them carefully, sometimes guess, and try different things to satisfy them. Even though we sometimes have trouble figuring out exactly what a baby wants, the fact that we keep trying teaches babies how important we are to them — and how important they are to us!

It is critical to satisfy a baby's need for food and warmth and safety. It is also important to give the baby more than just those basics. Playing with the baby by exchanging smiles, by gentle touches, and with little games like peek-a-boo constitute more than "play." It is the natural way to strengthen the bond between parent and baby. It is also a natural way to communicate with the baby and build the baby's understanding of communication. Babies who feel loved and secure have extra energy available for learning language and other skills ([Slade, 1987](#); [Thompson, 1998](#); [Vondra & Barnett, 1999](#)).

A More In-Depth Look: Use as many senses as you can to send messages to a deaf or hard of hearing baby. Emphasize touching games. Move your body and face and hands around in front of the baby. Emphasize your facial expressions even more than usual. Talk to the baby, too.