

Baby talk by parents is a priceless gift

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Now that you've spent a week's salary on toys designed to make your baby bright, creative, and happy, I'm going to tell you how to accomplish the same thing without spending a dime.

Why didn't I tell you this before the holidays? Because you wouldn't have listened then. Because the holidays are fun, and buying toys that let you dream about your child's future are something every parent enjoys.

But the hubbub is over now, so listen up . . .

Talk to your baby.

That's it. No batteries. No sales tax. No assembly required.

And it's easy.

While you feed your baby, turn off the TV and talk about the cereal or the vegetable, what color it is, how yummy. Tell him the milk comes from cows (moo!) Tell him what you are going to do later that day. And sing to your baby as he eats, whether it's the itsy bitsy spider song or your favorite by Radiohead. Everyone likes dinner and a show.

As you get her dressed, tell your baby what you are doing. "We're changing your shirt. First, we'll take the pink one off. Now, we can put on the yellow one. Let me put one of your arms in the sleeve. Thank you! Look, there are circles on your shirt." As you put on her socks, take 20 seconds to recite "This little piggy..." You're not only getting her dressed; you're having fun. You don't need to juggle or do card tricks. Show him how the key fits in the lock, how the zipper goes up and down, how the switch makes the light go on. "See the light? On. Off. On. Off." Look out the window together. "It's a sunny day! I see a bird up in that tree. Look, it flew down. Here comes a car. The car goes vroom, vroom."

Sounds like nonsense?

Remember that your baby doesn't know what up is, as opposed to down. Sky, birds, trees, and cars are all new to her. The most basic concepts need to be noticed, puzzled over, stored in memory for use later. Show your baby that one flower is red, another pink; one is big, another small. Hold him close and talk as you watch a spider make its way over a stalk of grass. He'll catch your enthusiasm and grow up wanting to know about other things. And eventually he will copy the sounds you make and make them back to you, in the beginnings of conversation.

You can present the whole world to your baby, pile on the quality time without watching the clock, and come off looking like the smartest person in the whole world. My mom/dad knows everything!

Sure you do. So share what you know.

Talk.

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