

Talking, singing and reading with your baby in the first two years

What does the research say?

Talking

Babies have a preference for speech over non-speech and the more language they hear in their native language, the more sensitive they become to their native language speech sounds.

Speaking using baby-directed speech ("sing song" way which has higher pitch, slower speech rate and short sentences) is a good way to exaggerate critical sounds within speech and it's more interesting for babies so they are more likely to pay attention to it (Werker et al., 2007).

Talking to your baby as much as possible is important in the first year of life. For example, research shows that at 9 months, frequently talking to your baby while doing other things is a stronger predictor of early communication skills than reading to your baby (Murray et al., 2014).

Singing

Babies show higher levels of attention to singing than speech (Nakata & Terhub, 2004).

Singing attracts and maintains your babies' attention - creating early opportunities to interact and emotionally bond with your baby (Etoile et al., 2006; Trainor, 1996).

Parents – your musical abilities don't matter! Babies cannot differentiate between good or poor singers, they simply prefer a song sung by their parent than one played by a toy (Etoile et al., 2006).

Reading

The more frequently and the greater variety of books you read to your child at age 10-17 months, the higher your child's vocabulary (Richman & Colombo, 2007).

Reading books to your child when they are 2-3 years old means they are likely to understand more words at age 5 (Farrant & Zubrick, 2013).

There are lots of benefits of reading books! Reading to your child is entertaining (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2001), provides an opportunity for closeness and bonding (Audet et al., 2008) and helps teach them new vocabulary (Sénéchal, 1997).