

Babbling to your baby is best



Researchers found that while baby talk may be annoying in public places it is also crucial to language development

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Goo-goo ga-ga, antidisestablishmentarianism. If you want to have more eloquent children, it might be best to talk to them as though they are idiots.

Researchers from the University of Washington have found that while baby talk — the high-pitched chatter in which vowels are elongated and parents discuss nonsense with their offspring — may be extremely annoying in public places, it is also crucial to language development.

Children who were spoken to the most in this manner as babies, as opposed to in normal speech, knew an average of 433 words by the age of 2, whereas children spoken to the least in this way knew only 169.

The scientists came to the conclusion, in a paper due to be published in the journal

Developmental Science, after studying 26 babies.

At a year old, they were given vests containing recording devices that were attached to them for eight hours a day for four days.

Their interactions with adults were then analysed. Those who had regular individual contact in “parentese”, as the scientists referred to baby talk, also babbled more in response at the age of 1 — another signal for better language development.

Patricia Kuhl, a professor and co- director at the university’s Institute for Learning and Brain Sciences, said that this was crucial.

“It’s not just talk, talk, talk at the child,” she said. “You want to engage the infant and get the baby to babble back. The more you get that serve and volley going, the more language advances.”

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