

The Importance of Being Noisy

We often talk to parents that feel their child appears to be very nervous when talking in front of others. Parents sometimes report that their child might babble when they are in bed or when playing in another room alone but when others are around they may become silent; they may look around to see who is watching or listening to them and will avoid using their voice if there are others nearby. Some children might whisper around people they aren't comfortable with, or stay completely silent and only use gestures to communicate.

Why is being noisy important?

Research shows that children who don't babble or experiment with their voices often during infancy and early toddlerhood have a greater risk of experiencing communication and language delays. It is important for infants and toddlers to practice using their voices, regardless of what it sounds like, in order for them to gain better control of the sounds they make.

Why are some children so quiet?

We don't always know. Some children seem more self-conscious of trying to use their voices, particularly if they aren't sure their sounds will come out right. The child might be comfortable doing this kind of practice only with their immediate family, or even only their parents/guardians. For some children it takes more work to figure out the coordination necessary to use their voice to make specific sounds.

What do we do about it?

When a child is having a hard time learning to use their voice more we usually focus on just helping them to be noisier overall. We always start with helping them be successful with just turning their voice on and off before trying to work on specific sounds or words. Finding ways to help your child practice without being corrected may help them be more comfortable trying new things.

Having members of the family make silly sounds together can help the child realize that when using your voice there is no one "right" thing to say. It frees up the child



to practice whatever kinds of sounds they want without worrying that the people around them will think they are doing it wrong. Other children do well with music playing or while watching a movie so they can practice vocalizing while having other sounds to take some of the attention off of their own voice. Some children respond really well to using sound effects at first instead of specific speech sounds during playtime; for example, animal noises or sounds a car makes.

Repetition can also help children feel comfortable attempting new sounds or words. When there is a song with repetitive lyrics or a game with repetitive language, it makes it easy for the child to know what language is coming next. This gives them more opportunities to attempt a sound or word in the song or game.

Finding what works for your child may take some time, and it may take trying more than one approach. Whatever works for your child, remember to make them feel comfortable with what they are doing. This may mean praising whatever sounds they do make to give them the confidence to keep trying and practicing, or it may mean giving them time and space to practice without you reacting until they are comfortable enough to want to see your reaction.

Once you find a method that works for your child, be sure to share it with other caregivers and family members.