

Name: _____

Skimming Skim each paragraph and select the sentence that best describes the main idea. Write the letter of the paragraph on the line.

Main idea	Answer
1. The choices parents make for their baby can affect its personality.	
2. “Baby talk” comes naturally to adults because babies need it.	
3. Parents have an important role in helping develop their baby’s ability to talk.	
4. Interacting with a baby should be both verbal and physical.	

A Anyone who has ever seen an adult interact with a baby knows how silly the whole thing looks. Why is that grandmother babbling like a baby, you might think. Why is that father cooing and making funny faces? And why is everyone imitating the sounds the infant makes? How will the baby pick up the language if adults don’t use real language with him? Well, it turns out that “baby talk” is exactly what a baby’s brain needs to learn a language. Adults instinctively know that that “silly” tone of voice is what babies associate with the mother’s voice, with feeding and comfort. That’s why they use it.

B Even at very early stages of development, babies have the capacity to understand the general meaning of what people are saying. They can also interpret emotional tones. This is why it’s so important to communicate with babies early and often. Here are four tips for parents:

- Facial expressions are important. Smiling at your baby can reassure them and encourage them to continue making sounds, so do this whenever your baby engages in “baby talk,” such as cooing and gurgling.
- Give your baby attention by looking at them. Try to decode not only their verbal communication but also their nonverbal communication. As with gurgling and babbling, facial expressions and body gestures can signal things like frustration and joy.
- Parents should also remember that communicating with babies, just like communicating with adults, is a two-way street. Parents should have “conversations” with their babies. This will help babies learn the back-and-forth nature of adult conversations. So do your best to respond, even when you’re not sure what your baby is trying to vocalize.
- It’s been suggested that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. That may or may not be true, but we do know that repeating is one of the surest ways to encourage your baby to talk. So when your baby makes a distinguishable “da-da,” you should smile and echo a distinct “da-da” right back. They will interpret this as praise and will be more likely to retain the new utterance.

C There is always this question: What determines a child’s character, personality, and behavior – nature (biology) or nurture (environment and education)? Research with babies seems to suggest that nature is a key factor in the way language is acquired and developed. However, other studies provide evidence that each situation or context will also influence the way a young child learns to communicate. For example, the type of toy that a child plays with will determine the kind of language that they use. If a child is given a model grocery store or a tea set, there will naturally be more conversation and role-play, based on adult interaction that the child has witnessed. If on the other hand, the toy is a car that can be taken apart and put together again, there is likely to be a lot less talk. Although both types of toys contribute to the development of different skills and intelligences, it is important for parents to bear in mind that “social, interactive” toys, such as a grocery store, or a gas station, encourage children to practice the kind of conversation that is necessary to communicate with friends and family or in work situations, later in life.

D Campell Leaper, of the University of California, is among the researchers that support the view that verbal ability is the result of both nature and nurture. Parents might naturally respond to their baby’s biology, but they can also contribute to the child’s development through the choices they make. Such choices include the way they talk to their child, the toys and activities they choose, as well as the experiences and interaction they expose their child to. If you are a parent, always keep in mind that your baby loves to hear your voice, whether you’re engaged in baby talk or adult talk. Either way, it’s a known fact that your voice helps your child feel good and develop their language skills.