



Building Language in Babies and Toddlers Who are Deaf

By Sarina Roffé

Cued Speech builds language and an internal understanding of a spoken language. So when we cue to our children, we are providing the building blocks for language, communication and ultimately literacy.

Building language in babies and toddlers who are deaf and hard of hearing is as simple as just cueing, the same way a parent would develop language in a hearing child. Still, there are some guidelines that provide an outline for parents in need of more specifics.

It's very important that parents don't 'dumb down' their language. Talking and cueing to your child will build language. The more language a child acquires, the stronger the foundation for literacy. The following suggestions may help parents build language in their children who are deaf and hard of hearing.

- Talk about how things are the same or different
- Talk about emotions and how things feel. If your child is angry or sad or happy, give him or her words to say it.
- Capitalize on your child's interests.
- Listen to hearing children talk among themselves. Listen for phrases you wouldn't normally say and work them into the vocabulary you use with your child.
- Use and expect language and you will get language. Cue all the time and be consistent in your expectations.
- Avoid baby language. A pacifier is a pacifier, not a ba-ba or a bo-bo or a paci.
- Think of your home as a laboratory of learning and use it.
- Cue sounds in the environment, especially with cochlear implant children because it validates what they hear. As language builds, expect expressive speech, especially with questions. For example:
- Talk and cue about what you are doing – washing dishes, loading the dishwasher, cooking, brushing your teeth, taking a bath, etc.
- Cue babble or whatever your child says – cueing it back reinforces what they are saying and tells them that you understood them.
- Remember to cue colors – not just red, blue and yellow, but magenta, purple, lavender and turquoise.
- Say and Cue body parts, farm animals and zoo animals.
- Count objects and use numbers
- Use the names of the shapes of objects – triangles, squares, polygons, ovals
- Sing and cue the alphabet.
- Use prepositions and opposites – on, off, under, over, near, far, next to, in, out, etc.



- Use adjectives – the dog’s tail is bushy, thin, thick, long, short. A pattern is plaid, or striped or solid colored. He is wearing a flowery shirt. Talk about how things smell and their texture – soft, hard, sandy, rough, smooth.

- Use brand names – Nike sneakers, Calvin Klein.
- Use names of toys and characters, like Dora the Explorer, Jake and the Neverland Pirates
- Sing and cue nursery rhymes with your child.
- Identify items in the room and cue their names to your child. Describe them. For example, “we have a blue sofa.” Or “the picture on the wall has flowers.”
- Take field trips and use experiences to build language. For example, say and cue the names of animals and their habitats during a visit to the zoo.

Reading with Babies and Toddlers

- Read and cue to your child as often as possible. Age appropriate picture books with sounds and rhymes are ideal.
- Point to words and pictures as you read, and of course, cue those words to your child.
- Read and cue your child’s favorite books over and over again. Repetition builds language.
- Share family anecdotes with your child.