

Especially for practitioners working with infants!

Infant Cooing Activities

Vocalizing and Listening

What is the practice?

This practice guide includes ways to get infants to vocalize more to their parents, caregivers, and others. Listen for cooing sounds like ah, ooh, eee, uh, and ah-ee. Infants who learn to use cooing to communicate are able to start and continue interactions and play with other people.



What does the practice look like?

Increasing infant vocalizations is best done during face-to-face interactions between the baby and yourself. Any kind of play episode is likely to encourage infant vocalizations. The practice simply involves repeating or imitating the sounds the infant makes. It will not take long for the child to learn that any time he vocalizes to you, you respond by repeating what he said.



How do you do the practice?

Following these simple steps will most likely get the infant to vocalize more and more.

- Start by placing the child in a comfortable position. Very young infants often like lying on their backs or being held in your lap, looking up at you.
- Talk to the infant while gently tickling his tummy or neck. Sometimes, touching the infant's mouth with light pats will get him to make sounds.
- Anytime the infant makes a sound, imitate what he says. At first, the sound you repeat should match or be about the same as the sound he makes. It is best to wait until the child is finished "talking" before imitating his sounds.
- Every once in a while, vary the sounds you use to imitate or repeat what the infant has said. If he says "ah," you might say "ah goo." Adding variation to the infant's sounds is likely to capture his interest.
- Be sure to show the infant that the sound play is fun. Smile, laugh, and show that you are excited. If you are enjoying the game, he will likely show the same enjoyment.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does the infant vocalize more often when he sees a game partner?
- Is the infant using different kinds of cooing sounds?
- Does the infant get more and more excited while playing sound games?

Take a look at more infant cooing activities

After-Nap Cooing Game

Seven-month-old Tyler lies in his crib after waking up from a nap. He makes his favorite babbling sounds and tries to make new sounds. His repertoire now includes ah, ah-ha, eee, ooh, and ohh-goo. Tyler is also trying to make sounds like blowing raspberries. His caregiver, Miriam, waits until he is “talking away” before going to pick him up. Before Tyler can see her, Miriam repeats whatever sounds he happens to be making. This is a game that Tyler and Miriam have been playing for some time. Tyler smiles and laughs whenever he hears her voice. She moves into Tyler’s line of vision and says, “You hear Miriam, don’t you?” This gets him to make even more sounds, which Miriam repeats. Then she says something just a little different to get him to repeat the new sound. He does not always get it just right, but he clearly loves this exchange.



Time To Play

Four-month-old Alexis knows that it is “time to play” whenever her father places her on her back on a favorite blanket. Her home visitor gives Dad some ideas about how to talk to Alexis to get her to respond. Alexis’s father starts a game of vocal play by asking, “Is my little girl going to talk to her daddy?” This gets Alexis to start making different cooing sounds. As Alexis’s home visitor suggests, each time she makes a cooing sound, her dad waits for her to finish. Dad then repeats the sounds to Alexis’s delight. Dad has learned that imitating his daughter’s sounds gets her to “talk” more and more to him.

Turning Up the Volume

It is sometimes hard for 9-month-old Cindy to make sounds loud enough for her mother to hear. Cindy’s early interventionist has helped her mom find a simple way for Cindy “to be heard.” They use a child’s microphone and amplifier to “turn up the volume.” The first time Cindy heard her own cooing sounds loud and clear she was startled. But now she starts “talking” whenever Mom brings out the microphone. Mom imitates Cindy and sometimes makes other sounds for Cindy to hear as they go back and forth “talking” to each other. Cindy is now able to make louder sounds since she has started her own version of karaoke!

