



My baby's hearing

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When babies are born, they already have the ability to hear. In fact, several months before they are born, they can react to sound. Have you ever noticed, during pregnancy, how a baby will move more when there are sounds around, or when mom sings, or plays music? Yes, babies can hear during pregnancy, so when they are born, they can hear very well. However, they still have a lot to learn about those sounds they can hear, and this will come gradually.

Hearing at birth

Since babies normally can hear at birth, that is why several regions, provinces or countries will have a universal hearing screening. This will help identify babies who have a hearing impairment, right from day one. Since hearing is one of the most important requirements to learn to speak, early detection of hearing loss is crucial.

Where is that coming from?

Sound location is a skill we probably take for granted as we use it every day, without thinking. You can easily spot where a sound comes from but your baby has to develop this skill. You probably won't have much to do to specifically help your child learn this skill however, it is interesting to stop and pay attention to how he learns it.

Sound localisation by age

Even if your child is born with a perfectly healthy hearing, his reaction to sound will change over time. Observe your child and you will see those changes.

- **Up to 3 months old**, your child will show some reactions to sudden sounds; he can start crying, he can startle, he can stop nursing, etc. but he has no interest in finding out where that sound came from.
- **Around 3 months**, your child will be more aware of his environment and will often associate the sound he hears to the thing or the person he sees. This means that if your



child is looking straight at you when the dog barks, he will likely smile, maybe thinking “you” did the barking!

- **Around 4 months**, your child will have realized that all the sounds are not coming from straight in front of him, and it might come from the left or the right side. So when a sudden and interesting sound is heard, he will try to look for it on the side. However, if the sound is not straight to the left or the right, he won't find it.
- **Around 5 months**, your child will have learned that sounds can come from the left or right side but they can also come from above or below. When he will hear a sound, he will first try to find it on the side, and then, go up or down.
- **Around 6 months**, your child will have put that all together and will likely go straight to the correct location of the sound.

These stages are average and will also depend on the interest of the child. If your baby is really concentrated on playing with his toes, the squeaky toy might just not interest him. Or if your baby is tired or sleepy, he might not have much interest in making an effort to find that sound. Selective attention starts quite early! This is nothing to be concerned about.

But he is not turning...

If you notice a pattern of lack of reaction over several days, that you cannot attribute to being too concentrated on something or being too tired, then you might want to consider asking a health care professional to check your child's ears. Ear infections are fairly common in young children, and each one means a period of a few weeks when your child will not hear correctly, therefore will miss opportunities to develop his language. The medical term for those ear infections is “*otitis media*”. Some children never have ear infections, while others are more prone to them.

Teaching my child

In order for your child to learn to identify the location of sounds, you can simply play with him, using various objects making different sounds. You can also use your own voice and call the child by his name. You don't need fancy toys: anything that makes noise is enough. You can use a squeaky toy, a little bell, even just a set of keys. Stay behind him (so he does not see you) and make some sounds. Watch him search for that sound, and mostly, have fun!