



Parentese

Parentese is a listening and spoken language strategy that does not require a response from your child. It is a way of speaking to infants and is also known as “motherese” or “infant directed speech”. The key characteristics of parentese include using a sing-song voice when speaking to your infant, talking in a higher pitch, and stretching out the vowel sounds in the words you use.

We use parentese to help our children focus on what we are saying when they are very young. Parentese helps introduce young children to spoken language. Infants like listening to parentese, because it is interesting to them and helps them focus on what you are saying for longer periods of time.

Watch how this mother uses parentese with her child. Her voice is higher than she might normally sound, she emphasizes the vowel sounds in each word by stretching them out, and is more excited in her way of reading than how she might read to an older individual. Also notice how the way she is speaking holds the interest of her toddler for a longer period of time as they read together.

When your child reaches their first birthday, your use of parentese will start to naturally fade away. Parentese will start fading away when your child is able to talk to you using one or two word statements. You may occasionally see professionals or teachers using parentese with your preschool or kindergarten-aged child if they have recently been fitted with a hearing device.

Parentese is an easy strategy to use whenever you are speaking directly to your infant. Your high voice, stretched out words, and softer tone of voice will keep your baby engaged with what you are saying. This starts them on the journey of learning to listen and their language development.

Notice how the mother repeats several important routine directions to her child as they read together. She uses parentese to help him understand and remember the directions she is giving him as they turn pages together.



Parents, family members, therapists, teachers, and anyone who works with or takes care of your child can use the parentese strategy. This strategy is easy to use and doesn't require a lot of training. Teach your family members how to use this strategy to help them support your child's listening development through consistent use of the strategy.

The first step is to identify your reason for wanting to use the parentese strategy, and the specific issue you would like to work on. For example, to help your child focus on what you are saying or to introduce your child to new simple words like on, off, or book.

Second, set a SMART goal to help you take the next step. A SMART goal is specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and it has a deadline for you to act on your goal.

For example, if your goal is to use the Parentese strategy, a SMART goal might look like this:

Specific: I want to help my child listen longer when we read books

Measurable: I will use the strategy during our reading time every night

Achievable: the goal should be something you feel confident you can do

Relevant: the goal should be relevant to you, for example, I want my child to listen to books so he will be ready to learn how to read and

Time-bound, you have a deadline for acting on your plan, such as I will use the strategy every night, starting today.

Third, think about potential barriers you might experience that could keep you from acting on your goal. For example, do you get distracted or do you have a busy schedule and might this cause you to forget to start using the strategy? Do you need more resources or instruction to help you understand more about using the strategy? Maybe it feels unnatural to you to use the strategy.

Finally, problem solve potential barriers. For example, you can teach family members the strategy so you can support each other, you can incorporate the strategy into everyday activities, you can practice them with a friend, or you can discuss your concerns with a professional you trust, such as your speech-language pathologist, early interventionist, deaf educator, or audiologist. This will help you manage challenges more easily if they occur. You can better help your child when you are able to cope with barriers as they arise.