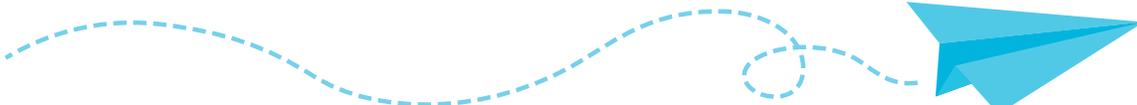


PAUSE TIME



Read

Pause Time

If you observe adults having a conversation you might not notice many pauses. Due to the pace of adult-to-adult interactions, they often “ping pong” back and forth in a nearly seamless stream of sound. In fact, in some cultures extended pauses make people uncomfortable. Many of us have experienced that uneasy feeling which comes from a lull in the conversation. Most of the time, someone jumps in to fill the pause with words. Sometimes a pause may feel particularly long. However, if you actually timed the pause you might be surprised to discover it was much shorter than you thought.

Adults don't need much time to process language because experienced language users can understand the words while the other person is still speaking. By the time the speaker has finished a sentence, the listener has already been working on their own response and can jump in within milliseconds, sometimes even clipping the end of the speaker's turn. This is because an adult who is fluent in a language has the grammatical base stored into memory which enables him/her to predict the end of sentences while listening to a speaker. The new language user needs to hear the message in its entirety before s/he can process the information for meaning. Sometimes young children listen to the beginning and tune out by the end. Sometimes children forget the beginning by the time they hear the end of the sentence. Sometimes their auditory memory skills are just not sufficient to process verbal messages with a few different components. They simply can't store the message long enough to extract the meaning.

Regardless of the type of breakdown a child demonstrates, extended and more frequent

By slowing your speaking rate it will be easier to add pauses, and they won't seem as obvious or unnatural

pauses and slightly slower speaking rates are usually helpful strategies to improve their overall comprehension of spoken language.

Add more pauses? You might think that's easy enough, but if you're a person who talks a lot this may be a difficult task. For some chatterboxes it's hard to slow down enough to add any pauses at all. If this is you, start by trying to speak softer and slow down your overall rate a bit. Be careful not to distort the natural rhythm or sounds in your speech. By slowing your rate it will be easier to add pauses, and they won't seem as obvious or unnatural as when you are speaking at a fast speed. You should also notice that it becomes easier to use the full range of pitch and melody when you are not speaking so fast. As you might recall from the “Parentese” packet last month, using enhanced melody is very helpful to focus a baby's attention on your voice.

In the infant stages, your pauses are marking the future talk turns of your baby.

Even before the baby has developed words s/he may take his/her conversational turn with only a

facial expression, body movement, simple vocalizations, or more sophisticated babble. As your baby starts to take those turns and eventually speak with true words, your pauses will let him/her know it's his/her turn. Each time you finish a thought, stop and wait a few seconds. This takes practice because, as adults, we are accustomed to much faster speed. Equally challenging, but also important, is to pause after your baby babbles or speaks to let him/her possibly add more information. Basically, give your baby a chance to "hear him/herself think" and to think about what s/he is hearing or saying.

It is quite common to teach older children to "stop, look and listen" before crossing the street. You can apply that same principle to interactions with your

baby as a reminder of the importance of pause time.

STOP....to give your baby a chance to process what you are saying.

LOOK.....to let your baby know it's his/her turn to say (or babble) something.

LISTEN....to let your baby know his/her voice is important and you are interested. 

References

Talbot, Pamela. *Topics in Auditory-Verbal Therapy*. Copyright 2002.

