



The Home

Baby Talk

Every one is amused at the first efforts the little child makes to speak. The tiny lips are pursed and twitched in desperate attempts to utter the word which his mind has been more alert to catch than his tongue to pronounce. At this early age the child has comparatively few ideas and emotions that call for expression, but even were he fully equipped with the psychological elements of speech, he is still incapable of adequately symbolizing his thoughts and feelings in language because of the imperfect condition of his speech mechanism. The obstacles that lie before the child, especially from the organic side, should gain from his elders sympathy, assistance, and encouragement in the difficult task of learning to speak. The elegant and fluent use of the mother-tongue is an enviable attainment which involves painstaking perseverance, particularly on the part of the parents. It begins from the moment that the infant utters his first word; it entails constant surveyance of the child's attempts, and prompts correction of mistakes. Baby talk is a necessary stage in the process of learning a language, but is not to be tolerated for its own sake simply because of its peculiar charm. It is an imperfection that should be outgrown as soon as possible. In the presence of the child only the proper forms of speech and pronunciation should be employed. It is relatively easy to make one's meaning clear without sacrificing elegance or accuracy. Preciseness of language is well adapted to create a methodical manner of thinking as the child grows older. The habit of inventing meaningless and nonsensical terms, as well as the use of "slanguage" or improper forms of speech, are perversions that follow quite naturally from the abuses of the baby-talk period. Complacent indulgence by parents of the unavoidable defects of childhood speech must logically issue in distorted notions regarding the value of an accurate and refined idiom. It devolves upon parents and teachers to set the perfect language-model before the child, and to immediately correct instead of indulging his natural or acquired shortcomings of speech.