

TRANSCRIPT: Simple beginnings

[Narrator]

“At only a few months, Alice may have highly attuned language abilities. But her parents are providing a unique framework, a contrived conversation easing her into the world of communication.”

[Woman]

“It’s important when you’re looking at caregivers and infants to focus on what both parties are doing, and not just one or the other. From the point of view of the caregiver, in linguistic terms they are really speaking a new language. Now if you gave me a three-month-old right now I could do it, I find it difficult to do just in an adult setting. There’s something that we call ‘motherese’, or ‘baby talk’ or ‘parentese’ to be correct I think, where we use very, very exaggerated contours. Let me try anyway, “hello Richard that’s a *telephone*, isn’t it a *telephone*”. So we repeat a lot, we point a lot, we exaggerate certain syllables of a word and we exaggerate the ends of sentences and things. Now we know from research that babies pick up on that very quickly. That’s the way that they distinguish their mother tongue from other languages. ‘Motherese gives them that in a very, very exaggerated form.’”

[Narrator]

“However well attuned the newborn is, learning a language is a genuinely two-way process.”

[Mother]

“I’d say something and give her space to talk back, and because often she’d join in and then instead of carrying on with her joining in, I’d suddenly realise ‘oh, no, hey, she’s talking to me’. So I’d shut up and then, so we’d develop, I suppose we developed over a time, I mean this sort of answer, question-answer response thing where I would wait for her to talk back to me and really give her the space; and then eventually she’d fill it. And so hopefully she was just realising that communication is a two-way thing, that its fine and you can overlap and everything, but basically you give and take, you give and take, and that’s what she does now”.