
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

How do babies communicate?



This is not a word-for-word transcript.

Neil

Hello. This is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Neil.

Beth

And I'm Beth. As an adult, when I need to tell somebody something, I just open my mouth and speak. Neil, I'm hungry.

Neil

Ahh, you'd better get something to eat then. And when I want something, it's the same – I just ask. Erm, can you pass me that pen, please Beth?

Beth

There you go! So that's now, but as babies, we're not able to speak – we can only communicate with our bodies or by crying. We can't clothe, feed or wash ourselves – we rely on others totally for our survival.

Neil

We've all been one, but how do newborn babies tell Mum and Dad what's going on before they can speak? That's what we'll be investigating in this episode, along with some useful new vocabulary, all of which you can find on our website, bbclearningenglish.com.

Beth

Baby communication is a topic child psychotherapist Marie Derome writes about in her new book, *What Your Baby Wants You to Know*. So, what do newborn babies want us to know? Well, here's Marie's answer:

Marie Derome

I think they want us to know that they need us **one hundred percent**, because without us, they won't survive.

Neil

Without someone caring for them, babies wouldn't survive, so on a basic level every baby is saying, "Take care of me!" Marie says babies need us **one hundred percent**. She uses the phrase **one hundred percent** to emphasise that what she said is completely true.

Beth

And we'll hear more soon, but first I have a question for you, Neil. Although they look small and helpless, babies are born with some amazing abilities. So, which of the following statements about newborn babies is true:

- a) babies are born with a full set of teeth,
- b) babies' eyes change colour, or
- c) babies have the same number of bones as an adult?

Neil

Ooh, that's an interesting question. I think I know the answer, though. I'm going to go with b) babies' eyes change colour.

Beth

OK. Well, we'll find out if that's right at the end of the programme. Now, if you've spent time with a baby, you've probably noticed how much they move their little arms and legs. Here, Marie Derome explains the meaning of these movements to BBC Radio 4 programme, Woman's Hour.

Marie Derome

75% of their movements are **intentional**, synchronised. They're not **jerky** – you know, **to the naked eye** they appear very **jerky**, but they're not. They're there to bring us in – the parents – you know, they need us... so all those movements are there to say, "Look! Come! Look at me. I need you. I want to, you know, to play with you."

Neil

Babies move their arms and legs to create a bond with their parents. **To the naked eye**, these movements look **jerky** – an adjective meaning sudden and quick, not smooth-flowing. The phrase **to the naked eye** means in a way that can be seen without special instruments, like a microscope, or is seen in the way an ordinary person would.

Beth

In reality, these **jerky** movements are **intentional**, meaning that they are planned and done for a particular purpose – to catch their parents' attention so they will be noticed and cared for.

Neil

Marie's book is aimed at new parents who are learning to understand their baby's body language, but she also has advice for parents who are finding it difficult to bond with their newborn, as she explains here to BBC Radio 4 programme, Woman's Hour.

Marie Derome

Parenting is really hard. Falling in love with this little baby is not... you know, this idea of **love at first sight** – I think it's such an **unhelpful cliché**. It will take time to love that baby, to get to know that baby...

Beth

Many new parents dream about falling in **love** with their baby **at first sight**. The idiom **love at first sight** means being in love with someone as soon as you see them for the first time.

Neil

But Marie thinks this ideal dream can cause problems. She calls it an **unhelpful cliché**. A **cliché** is an overused phrase or comment that has been said so much that it's become unoriginal and uninteresting, and in some cases unhelpful – for example by creating unrealistic expectations, or by making parents feel guilty they are not doing enough.

Beth

Marie says it takes time to get to know a newborn baby and to fall in love. But for most parents, all the misunderstandings, sleepless nights and dirty nappies are worth it for their amazing baby.

Neil

And speaking of amazing babies, what was the correct answer to your question, Beth?

Beth

Well, the correct statement was that babies' eyes change colour. I think you got that right, Neil.

Neil

I did! It's an amazing fact, but apparently true.

Beth

Yes, indeed. OK. So, let's recap the vocabulary we've learnt in this episode, starting with the phrase **one hundred percent**, which can be used to emphasise that you completely agree with something, or that you consider something to be completely right or wrong.

Neil

If you describe a movement as **jerky**, you mean it moves suddenly in stops and starts, rather than flowing smoothly.

Beth

The adjective **intentional** means planned and purposeful.

Neil

The phrase **to the naked eye** means in a way that can be seen without special instruments, or to someone without special knowledge.

Beth

The idiom **love at first sight** describes the experience of starting to love someone as soon as you see them for the first time.

Neil

And finally, an **unhelpful cliché** is an overused phrase or comment – a cliché – which has the effect of creating unhelpful or unrealistic attitudes. Once again, our six minutes are up, but remember you can find many more episodes, plus a quiz and worksheet for this one, on our website, bbclearningenglish.com. Goodbye for now!

Beth

Bye!

VOCABULARY

one hundred percent

used to emphasise that you agree completely with something, or that it is completely right or wrong

jerky

quick and sudden; stopping and starting, rather than smooth-flowing

intentional

planned; done on purpose

to the naked eye

as seen without specialist instruments or specialist knowledge

love at first sight

(idiom) experience of starting to love someone as soon as you see them for the first time

unhelpful cliché

overused phrase or comment (cliché) which has the effect of creating negative or unrealistic attitudes