

Baby Talk

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Being the only girls, in a family of five children, I've thoroughly enjoyed talking and spending time with my sister all my life. Early on, we formed a unique and continuing close relationship.

As close as we are, my sister and I are quite different, particularly regarding our communication styles. It's not that my sister is shy or doesn't have much to say, she just won't strike up a conversation with a stranger on the bus or in the park. She once ordered *50 Things to Talk About on a First Date* to end the awkward silence she often experienced on dates.

All my life I've struggled to foster conversation if the topic wasn't something of particular interest to her. Pregnancy is now of interest to her as she is carrying her first child about whom she constantly talks.

I first thought that talking 24/7 about interesting pregnancy symptoms and nursery decorations would interest me, and it did for the first month or so. But no longer, as I'm the mother of two babies. Talking about babies is now my least favorite topic.

First I tried to ignore talking about babies and focus on her excitement. It's not her fault I'm done with the baby train. It's not her fault that for the past four years it seems that everyone I meet asks, "How are the babies?" or "Is she crawling? Does he poop regularly?" And there's, "Wow you look tired!" and "I see you choose to breastfeed." What does that even mean? Are you commenting on the dark circles under my eyes or that my breasts have shrunk?

At this point I aim my conversations to include no “baby talk”. My adult conversations allow respite from talking to my children, about my children, for my children, and at my children.

Every few days my sister calls me. At first I would ask how she was feeling and she would start a monologue about her pregnancy that often lasted an hour. After weeks of this, upon hanging up I felt mentally exhausted and hurt that she never asked about my week. I also concluded that it was unhealthy for her to be so consumed by her pregnancy. In fact, her relationship with her husband was strained and she spent countless hours prepping for baby and reading baby-related articles. Surely, something must change. This change would benefit me and perhaps even my sister as she experienced life beyond her pregnancy.

So I attempted to change the topic. The first time she called I never asked about how she was feeling. Instead I did not wait for her to ask how are you? Or what did you do this week? (Had I waited it would have never occurred.) Instead I started talking about a T.V. show I enjoy. This worked well for a few moments until I mentioned the episode involved a baby which set off her “baby talk.”

A few days later she phoned me. That afternoon I was having a hard time with my son who was teething and inconsolably crabby. I had to vent and who better to vent than to my sister? What a mistake! She delivered a monologue that covered online stories about babies being born with full sets of teeth or long fingernails that painfully damaged the birth canal during delivery. These descriptions disturbed me and I got off the phone to tend to my miserable baby. This continued for weeks; I had failed to deter the “baby talk.”

But my last attempt at changing the topic was successful. She called and was noticeably quiet and I so I could speak about Bin Laden's execution. We spoke of the appropriateness of people celebrating the death of a person, regardless how horrific this person was. Amazingly, she did not once speak of her pregnancy. I concluded that for our conversations to have limited baby talk I must introduce an interesting topic from the beginning of our telephone conversation. I tested this theory a few days later and it was accurate. The following week she called and asked about my children and recent developments in my life.

I guess it would be helpful to mention that much of this started because I was aggravated with my sister selfishly hogging our conversations. I can count on one hand the number of times she asked me about my children or pregnancies. Before she was consumed with baby talk she was consumed with home buying talk, before that she was consumed with wedding talk, before that she was consumed with dating talk, and prior to that it was break up talk about previous boyfriends. The list is endless. When her child is born I am painfully aware that our future conversations will contain more baby talk. She will likely talk about sleep schedules, feeding schedules, the color of poop, how many times her son spat up that day, frequencies of crying, what he did that day, and how she feels about everything. All the while my life will be secondary and unnecessary to talk about unless I commit to limiting "baby talk" on a regular basis.

If I fail to change the topic, I will begin avoiding her phone calls and our relationship will suffer. I refuse to let that happen because as self-centered as my sister may be, she does care about me and my family; she just has not mastered the skills for two-way conversations. Even she will need a break from baby talk and I will surely help her and myself.