

No. 1 in a series

BACK TO BASICS

Child guidance: Infants

Babies are born with different temperaments. One baby may be active and curious, another is shy and fearful, and still another is hesitant but adaptable. Even so, all infants face a critical social-emotional task between birth and 12 months: developing trust. That means we respond promptly to their needs. There's no such thing as spoiling a baby.

Provide individualized care

Babies learn best when they are in a state of quiet alertness. The more time they spend in this state, the more they can learn because they don't have to work so hard to get their needs met.

- **Encourage attachment.** Respond quickly and sensitively to a baby's signals, cries as well as coos. As you get better at responding, the baby gets better at giving cues. As you get to know each baby as a unique individual, you and the baby grow attached to each other. Strive to build this attachment in everything you do with the baby—feeding, diapering, hand washing, and playing.
- **Learn the baby's cries.** Babies can have a dozen different cries, each indicating a different need—hungry, wet, cold, hurting, frustrated, or bored, for example. By learning what a particular cry means, you can better satisfy the need and build a sense of security.
- **Give lots of physical contact.** Hold the baby while bottle feeding, not only for safety but also to strengthen the emotional bond. Rock babies to sleep or lay them down and stroke their backs. Hold the baby while reading a story, and offer hugs and kisses during routines.

Distract, substitute, redirect

The short attention span of a baby enables you to use these techniques:

- **Distraction:** Ignacio continues to cry after Mama leaves, despite your best efforts to reassure him that she will return. Distract him with a puppet, song, or pop-up toy.
- **Substitution:** When Emily and Hannah struggle over a doll, offer one child a different doll or another toy as a substitute.
- **Redirection:** When Ethan crawls over to investigate the cover on the electrical outlet, carry him to the rug and introduce a new stacking toy.

- **Anticipate needs.** Anticipate, or predict, a baby's need for food, water, sleep, diapering, or play, so that you can quickly satisfy the need. Because Angie has had an unusually active morning climbing over floor pillows, for example, you may need to feed her and put her down for nap a bit earlier.
- **Babyproof the environment.** As babies learn to crawl, they can encounter dangers. Make sure the play area is safe and fun. That way, babies can explore freely without hearing you constantly saying "no."

Next: Guidance for toddlers



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This is the first of several pages of development information. Look for each one, printed on cardstock for durability, in our upcoming newsletters; we encourage you to collect each one for your files.

LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS OF LEARNING A SAFE AND SECURE ENVIRONMENT

Establishing a safe, secure and predictable environment for babies is the best way to create the foundations of learning in infancy.



Respond Warmly and Quickly to a Baby's Cues for Support and Attention.

Being responsive to a baby's signals for support or attention helps the baby trust the world around them and does not spoil the baby. An adult's positive responses allow babies to become comfortable in interacting with others and their environment. So, by responding warmly and quickly, you are putting in place the connections in babies minds that let them trust and explore the world around them. Key aspects in responding to baby's signals are:

- Sensitivity - Learn to be aware of baby's signals. Watch for how you can respond.
- Timing - Respond quickly to baby's signals, don't make them wait.
- Warmth - Be gentle and caring with babies when responding to their cues.
- Appropriateness - Try to give the right response to a baby's need for support.

Example - When reading to a baby, choose books with pictures that the baby enjoys. Read only as long as the baby seems interested, and involve the baby by asking open-ended questions.

Hold, Touch and Snuggle with Your Child

Touch is a fundamental and important source of security to a baby. If you deprive an infant of touch, the body and brain will stop growing in a healthy manner. Physical stroking helps premature babies gain weight more quickly and helps healthy babies digest food better. Babies cry less when they are held and carried regularly. Touch is an infant's lifeline to security, attachment and reassurance.

Example - Hold babies or carry them in a soft strap-on carrier that provides physical contact, snuggle with babies before putting them down to sleep and hug them many times a day.



Beware of Over-stimulating Your Baby

Some caregivers are so concerned with a baby's brain development that they buy expensive educational toys, videos, computers and language tapes. What does research suggest? Save your money. Too many new experiences or too much stimulation can cause stress and hinder a baby's development. Babies need freedom to explore on their own terms and not be exposed constantly to high levels of stimulation, such as watching television.



The brain develops through hands-on experience during a lifetime, but stress can inhibit this development. Watch your baby's signals to see when they are feeling overly stressed or stimulated. They will avoid, turn away, cover their face with their hands, hiccup, cry, become upset or become frustrated. Then take steps to reduce the stimulation and calm your baby.

Example - Engage babies by gently tickling or playing together. Watch their faces. Do they stop smiling or laughing, become upset or turn away? These actions may be signals of over-stimulation, and then you should slow the interaction down and make it more gentle.

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