

# BACK TO BASICS

## What it's like to be a baby

### Newborn

- I have soft areas in my skull where the bones haven't yet closed. You can sometimes see my pulse through this *fontanel*.
- I suck, swallow, startle, and grasp by reflex. I'll be able to do these things deliberately within a few months.
- I can hear and respond to different sounds. I'm especially sensitive to the voice of my primary caregiver.
- I can see, but my vision is limited. If you hold an object close to my eyes and move it slowly, I'll follow it with my eyes.
- I try to communicate my needs by crying. Soon I'll be able to tell you with words and gestures that I'm hungry, afraid, lonely, wet, or hurt.
- I'm beginning to feel secure and attached to you. Help me by holding me, talking to me, and playing with me. Your attention won't spoil me—it just lets me know that I can trust you.

### 2 to 4 months

- My upper body is active and strong. Make it safe for me to wave my arms, reach for objects, and roll from my tummy to my back.
- I recognize the sound of your voice and can tell if you're angry or frustrated. I can't always tell if you're unhappy with me or something else.
- I'm learning to put myself to sleep in my crib but always need to know that you're around if I need help.
- I use my voice to babble and coo. When you respond, I'm learning the rules of conversation that I'll use later when I can talk.
- I explore objects by putting them in my mouth. Help me learn about my world by giving me safe, clean things to hold and taste.

### 4 to 8 months

- I'm getting my first teeth and sometimes it hurts. Please help me learn to deal with the pain.
- I'm getting good at imitating sounds and actions. It makes me happy when you turn my efforts into a game.
- I've almost mastered deliberate swallowing. I can move soft solid food from the front of my mouth to the back—usually without spitting or choking.
- I can use my pointer finger and thumb to pick up small objects and move things from one hand to the other. I can do this so fast that it's best for you to always keep my play spaces free of things that are dangerous.
- I can roll over and sometimes scoot backward. Soon I'll master going forward.
- I'm beginning to understand that things exist even when I can't see them. That's why "Peek-a-boo" is my favorite game.
- I respond differently to strangers and people I know. Give me time to meet new people so I'm not afraid.

### 8 to 12 months

- I'm geared up for walking and talking. Your support and encouragement help me learn these important skills more easily.
- I do things—even naughty things—to get your attention. Show me that you're interested in what I do, and gently help me learn the right way to do things.
- I can pull myself up to stand but need you or sturdy furniture to help me balance and stay steady.
- I have eight to 10 teeth and find small crackers on a tray more interesting than formula in a bottle. Help me practice feeding myself. I'll get less messy soon.
- I recognize other children but don't know how to play with them. If you give us each toys to explore—but not share—we'll enjoy each other's company.
- I'm eager to explore and don't have enough experience to know what's safe and what's not. Help me learn rules by being consistent and keeping rules simple.

# Thinking Skills: Birth to 12 Months

Babies learn by using their senses. They explore and discover by touching and mouthing objects, hearing voices and music, and seeing the colorful, fascinating wonder all around them. But the most important part of your child's early learning experiences is you. It is through interactions and experiences with loved and trusted adults that babies begin to make sense of the world. In this first year, babies are learning very important concepts. They learn about *cause and effect* when they shake a rattle and hear a sound, or when they pull on their mother's glasses and hear her voice (much sterner than usual) tell them not to pull! They learn about *size and shape* by stacking blocks, mouthing them, and trying to fit them into the correctly-shaped holes. They learn to solve problems when they discover how to turn the crank to get the jack-in-the-box to pop up. They learn about gravity when they drop a spoon from the high chair and look down to the floor to see where it lands. They learn object permanence—that things they can't see still exist—when they play peek-a-boo or crawl into the next room to find you.

## Encourage your baby to explore

You will see your baby act on her natural curiosity about the people and objects around her as she looks carefully at your face, inspects her hands, fingers, feet and toes, rolls to get closer to a person she wants to connect with or to an interesting object, babbles and then waits for your response and looks at and reaches for objects that interest her. Your baby's curiosity reflects a desire to figure out how the people and objects in his world work. You will see your child's curiosity in action as he touches his fingers and toes, bangs and shakes objects to see what they can do, pulls on long hair or earrings, uses sounds, facial expressions and gestures to get your attention puts things in his mouth and watches things move.

These actions help babies learn and build their confidence that they can "make things happen." When children know they can have an impact on the people and objects around them, they feel confident and competent, which is a key part of developing positive self-esteem. In this way, thinking skills and social-emotional skills are tied together.

### What you can do:

- **Offer interesting objects to explore**—fabrics of various textures, a ball of sticky masking tape, a wooden spoon and a metal one to touch and compare.
- **Respond to her efforts to communicate.** Use words to describe what she is experiencing: I see you looking at that ball on the shelf. Let me get that for you.
- **Delight in their discoveries.** You found your hands! Look what they can do. You can use them to reach that red ball.
- **Provide the help your child needs to solve problems**, such as showing your baby how to get the lid off the container so she can reach the blocks inside. But before you jump in, give her a chance to do it herself first.



## Support your baby's growing memory and ability to understand new ideas

You will see your baby's memory develop as she recognizes familiar people, anticipates routines, for example, grabbing her "blanky" for naptime or crawling to the high chair when she sees you preparing food, responds (turning/smiling) when she hears her name spoken and shows pleasure when given a familiar object like a favorite book of her "lovey".

Your baby's growing memory also helps her learn that objects and people still exist even when he can't see them. This concept is called object permanence. You will see this new skill developing when your baby starts to look for hidden objects. This is because he remembers the object and knows it is still around...somewhere. He may also begin to protest when you leave him with a caregiver, even one he knows and loves. This is because he knows you are out there somewhere and naturally, he wants to make you come back!

During this first year your baby is also learning about the concept of cause and effect—that he can make things happen. When he shakes the rattle it makes a sound. When he bats at the mobile it moves. When he cries out for you, you come. Learning to make things happen is the foundation for solving problems. *I want dad's attention. What can I do? I will crawl to him and pull on his leg to let him know I want him to play.*

### What you can do:

- **Play disappearing and reappearing games.** Play peek-a-boo. Make a simple game of hiding objects to find. This helps develop your child's memory and teaches him about *object permanence*.
- **Encourage your child to explore objects and toys in different ways.** Touching, banging, shaking, and rolling help children learn about how things work. Talk with your child about what he is doing. "You got the truck to move by pulling the string!"