

Helping Your Child Get Ready for School

Birth to 1 Year

What to Expect -- Babies grow and change dramatically during their first year.

- ✓ They begin to develop some control over their bodies. They learn to hold up their heads; roll over; sit up; crawl; stand up; and, in some cases, walk.
- ✓ They become aware of themselves as separate from others. They learn to look at their hands and toes and play with them. They learn to cry when parents leave, and they recognize their name.
- ✓ They communicate and develop language skills. First babies cry and make throaty noises. Later they babble and say "mama" and "dada". Then they make lots of sounds and begin to name a few close people and objects.
- ✓ They play games. First they play with their hands. Later they show an interest in toys, enjoy "putting in and taking out" games, and eventually carry around or hug dolls or stuffed toys.
- ✓ They relate to others. First they respond to adults more than to other babies. Later they notice other babies but tend to treat them like objects instead of people. Then they pay attention when other babies cry.

What They Need -- Babies require:

- ✓ A loving caregiver who can respond to their cries and gurgles;
- ✓ Someone who gets to know their special qualities;
- ✓ Someone to keep them safe and comfortable;
- ✓ Opportunities to move about and practice new physical skills;
- ✓ Safe objects to look at, bat, grab, bang, pat, roll, and examine;
- ✓ Safe play areas; and
- ✓ Opportunities to hear language and to make sounds.

Developing Trust -- Newborn babies need to become attached to at least one person who provides security and love. This first and most basic emotional attachment is the start for all human relationships. Feeling your touch, hearing your voice, and enjoying the comfort of physical closeness all help a baby to develop trust.

- ✓ What you'll need: loving arms and music.
- ✓ Include happy rituals in your baby's schedule. For example, at bedtime, sing the same song every night, rock her, or rub her tummy.
- ✓ Pick up your crying baby promptly. Try to find out what's wrong. Is she hungry? Wet? Bored? Too hot? Crying is your baby's way of communicating. By comforting her you send the message that language has a purpose and that someone wants to understand.

- ✓ Gently move your newborn's arms and legs. Or tickle her lightly under the chin or on the tummy. When she starts to control her head, lie on the floor and put your baby on your chest. Let her reach for your nose, or grab your hair. Talk to her and name each thing she touches.
- ✓ Sing and cuddle with your baby. Hold her snuggled in your arms or lying face up on your lap with her head on your knees. Make sure the head of a newborn is well-supported. Sing a favorite lullaby. To entertain your baby, sing an active song. If you don't know lullabies or rhymes for babies, make up your own!
- ✓ Dance with your baby. To soothe her when she's upset, put her head on your shoulder and hum softly or listen to recorded music as you glide around the room. To amuse her when she's cheerful, try a bouncy tune.

Touch and See -- Babies are hard at work whenever they are awake, trying to learn all about the world. To help them learn, they need many different safe things to play with and inspect. Objects you have around your home offer many possibilities. You'll need:

- ✓ A splinter-free wooden spoon with a face drawn on the bowl;
- ✓ Different textured fabrics, such as velvet, cotton, corduroy, terry cloth, satin, burlap, and fake fur;
- ✓ An empty toilet paper or paper towel roll;
- ✓ Pots, pans, and lids;
- ✓ An old purse or basket with things to put in and take out;
- ✓ Measuring cups and spoons;
- ✓ Boxes and plastic containers;
- ✓ Large spools; and
- ✓ Noisemakers (rattles, keys, a can filled with beans).

What to do:

- ✓ Put one or two of the items listed above in a safe play area where your baby can reach them (more than two may confuse him).
- ✓ Let your baby look at, touch, and listen to a variety of objects. Ones that are brightly colored, have interesting textures, and make noises are particularly good. Be sure that any item you give your baby will be safe in his mouth, since that's where it probably will end up.
- ✓ Use these items for all age groups. Many of them will continue to interest toddlers and older preschoolers. For example, babies love to inspect a paper towel roll. But with a 4-year-old, it can become a megaphone for talking or singing, a telescope, or a tunnel for a toy car.
- ✓ Babies begin to understand how the world works when they see, touch, hold, and shake things. Inspecting things also helps them coordinate and strengthen their hand muscles.