

**TIME FOR BABY** Play ideas for supporting baby's social-emotional, language and motor development and shaping the parent-child relationship in the first year and beyond.

For a narrated slideshow of this information please visit [https://youtu.be/iKvun7EML\\_4](https://youtu.be/iKvun7EML_4)



**Early experiences matter!** Parents often have limited time with their infants. Newborns sleep a lot. Separation due to work or other reasons may occur for a few hours, days or longer. Close relationships with emotionally available, loving, responsive caregivers help babies experience and regulate their emotions. Here are some quick ideas to develop your relationship with your baby, support your baby's mental well-being and help baby's development during the first year and beyond.

### **Prepare yourself for your time with baby**

Whether you've been gone for the day, away for a long time or meeting for a visit, try to clear your mind of troubles so you can focus on the relationship. The quality of time spent matters more than the length of time. Caregivers need to take care of themselves to be able to take care of baby. Babies need help learning to feel and manage their emotions. They learn this through seeing caregivers respond to their needs calmly.

- Take some deep breaths. Count backwards from ten. Do gentle stretches.
- Think about the face and voice you're bringing to your baby.
- Listen to music, sing on your way there. Do what feels right for you.

### **What to do when baby cries**

Babies cry to communicate, sometimes 3 hours a day. Baby may be hungry, uncomfortable or in pain, overstimulated or over-tired. Some babies are harder to read than others. Babies are forgiving, if you have trouble reading their cues, there will be another chance to show them you can keep them safe and comfort them when they are distressed.



- **Only pick up baby when you are calm.** Take a deep breath and let it out slowly.
- Gently rock or walk around with baby.
- Sing or read to baby. Listen to your favorite music or a guided relaxation.
- Take baby for a walk in the stroller or a ride in the car seat.
- Put baby on their back in a safe place, like a crib or playpen, and go to another room. Check on baby every few minutes.
- Call a friend or family member or other support person to help.
- If it seems like baby is always crying, call the Fussy Baby Network leave a message and someone will get back to you, 1-888-431-2229. **In an emergency, dial 9-1-1.**

**NEVER, NEVER SHAKE A BABY OR CHILD!**

## **Babies are always communicating**

Even newborns are ready to interact and use their behavior to communicate and seek out connections with caregivers. Newborns can recognize their parent's voice and prefer it to other sounds. They tune into their parent's face and can recognize and imitate facial expressions very early in life. Early interactions have a big effect on developing trust, memory, language and mental health. Parents can show love with hugs, kisses, smiles and affirming words. Model positive self-talk and praise.

- **Set aside distractions:** Turn off the tv, phone and computer and pay attention to what baby does, says, what he's learning. American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no screen time at all for children under 2, except video chatting. We can set this example by putting devices away and truly being with baby. Screens can interfere with children's ability to experience, engage and learn from their environment, and can contribute to attention problems. TV does not give kids back and forth interaction and does not challenge them to explore their environment.



- **Eye contact:** Hold baby 9-15" away from your face. Eye contact helps with forming the parent-infant bond.
- **Snuggle:** Gentle touch has a positive effect on baby's development and the child-caregiver relationship.
- Check out a class on infant massage.
- **What do you notice?** Babies might yawn, hiccup, breathe differently, startle, tremble, look away or change colors when stressed or overstimulated. They need a break. Don't take it personally, their brains need a little extra time to process since *everything* is new to them.
- **What does baby like?** Does she spend time looking at a wall hanging or light? Label what you think baby sees, and use that for a kind of hide and seek game, turning her away from it and back again, "Where'd it go? There it is!"
- **Baby talk**
  - Slower, higher pitched, "sing-songy" speech is easier for babies to understand.
  - The Power of Pause: Show baby how to do something, or talk to them, wait and see what they do. Give baby time to respond.
  - Serve & Return: Imitate baby's simple babbling sounds, expressions or gestures. Keep the conversation going!



## **Just PLAY!**

### **You are baby's best friend and best toy!**

- Get down at baby's level, so they can see your face and you can recognize things from their perspective. This can also help you spot possible safety hazards!
- You may have to teach baby how to play. Show him how to find his feet, clap, shake a rattle, turn pages in a book, push buttons on a pop-up toy.
- The sillier you feel, the better when playing with baby!
- Make routines special
  - Be the newscaster- talk about what you're doing when you cook or clean.
  - Count toes and fingers during bathtime.
  - Name body parts during diaper changes.



### **Go outside!**



- Put on appropriate clothes/protection for the weather.
- Talk a walk.
- Rock, bounce, dance around with baby, vary your speed, but keep baby safe, protecting the head.
- Carry baby facing out to see everything.
- Talk about what you see, hear, smell and feel.
- Play peekaboo, I Spy.
- Take a blanket and try some tummy time.
- Provide a safe "home base" to come back to but give baby space to explore.

### **Don't be afraid to get dirty!**

- Blow bubbles. Play with leaves, water, grass, sand, rocks for a variety of sensations for hands and feet.
- Watch how baby responds to these sensations, don't force it or make baby uncomfortable for too long. Positive sensory experiences between babies and caregivers build trust.







## **Tummy Time**

Babies need time on their bellies while they're awake and supervised. Tummy time strengthens baby's neck, shoulder, and arm muscles for rolling, crawling, walking and other activities, even writing and sports. Check to make sure there is nothing in reach that could harm the baby.

**If it fits inside a toilet paper tube, baby can choke on it!**

- Limit time in containers such as swings, playpens, bouncers, carriers and car seats to prevent or correct flat spots on baby's head.
- Babies are just fine on the floor when supervised- a light blanket under them is ok. You need to be there to entertain and talk to him, it's scary down there all alone!
- Babies might spit up during tummy time, it's better to wait awhile after feeding. When you respond to baby's needs and discomfort, you gain baby's trust.
- Start with tummy time on your chest. Baby can see you, smell you and feel your heartbeat. Skin to skin can help baby with temperature regulation and calming.
- Start with just 2-3 minutes at a time, increasing to 10-15 minutes at a time, aiming for an hour or more per day by 3 months.
- Place baby where you can be face to face or look in a mirror, talk or sing to baby, make silly faces. Move around to help baby follow you, to look all the way left and right.
- Roll up a towel or stuffie under baby's armpits to help with lifting head and chest.



- Put a favorite toy in reach. As baby starts to get ready to crawl, place the toy just out of reach or put a hand behind each foot for something to push off from.
- If baby fusses with tummy time, try small doses often. Put baby down on the floor on their tummy after every diaper change and talk to them while you're cleaning up, the extra minutes add up!
- Once baby has enough head control, and doesn't have a full belly, try "Superman" or other flying games.
- Move on to crawling practice. Cheer him on, be the smiling face for him to crawl toward.

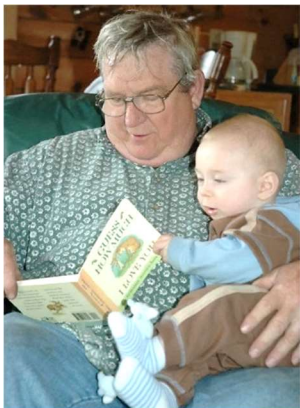
## **What if I can't be with my baby?**

Bond with baby from a distance: If video visits are an option, have the home caregiver set baby up to view the screen in a variety of positions including tummy time. You can do a lot of the same activities you would do if you were in person. Experts say that video chat with loved ones is acceptable screen time.

- Talk to baby. Talk about baby's surroundings or yours. Talk about something you want to do with baby when you can be there in person.
- Make faces. Smile! Bright eyes and a smile help baby organize her emotions.
- Imitate baby's sounds.
- Sing or read to baby.



If you have time to prepare for separation from your baby, there are lots of resources developed for parents that can help in many situations.



- Doll with parent's photo for military deployment <https://hugahero.com/>
- Leave something with your scent- clothing, blanket or stuffie
- Videos or record yourself reading book(s)
- Build a community and network around you and around baby and the caregiver at home for support while you're gone.
- Arrange to be a part of medical visits, either in person or virtually so you can ask questions. If the primary caregiver is acting like a gatekeeper for information, share that you want to be involved.

## **Other Resources**

- Military: Babies on the Homefront <https://babiesonthehomefront.org/>
- Divorce, Addiction, Incarceration and other tough topics: <https://sesameworkshop.org/tough-topics/>
- Fussy Baby Network <https://www.erikson.edu/fussy-baby-network/>
- Developmental Milestones <https://pathways.org/>
- <https://www.first5alameda.org/alameda-county-fathers-corps>. Fatherhood Photos

Either parent can develop symptoms of post-partum depression. If you have concerns about your or a partner's mental health, your baby's development or a relationship with your child, please speak to a medical or mental health provider.

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