

Growing Great Babies



Supporting Your Baby's Development

As the parent of a new baby, you have many hopes, dreams and expectations. You want to do everything in your power to support your child in becoming the best he or she can be. In the past parents and grandparents cared for babies based on what experience and cultural beliefs taught them was good for babies. Due to recent advances in technology and scientific research, experts who study the development of infants and young children have learned some pretty amazing and exciting things about what really determines what children become as adults and what you can do as a parent to produce the best results for your baby.

Most of who and what your new baby will become will be the result of his genetic make-up and the activity that takes place within his brain during the next three years. During this time his brain will undergo an explosion of development. By the time your child is three, 90% of his brain size and structure will be in place. If you were to compare the development of your baby's brain to the construction of a new house, by the time he is three years old not only would this house have a foundation, internal framework, plumbing, wiring, floors and a roof, it would have walls, windows, sinks and light fixtures. What would remain to add would be things like curtains, paint color, pictures and carpeting. After three years, changes in structure, wiring and plumbing would be possible, but would generally require a great deal of work, special skills and expense. A brief explanation of how this construction will occur in your baby's brain and what you can do to support the growth of a strong body, mind and spirit follows.



Your baby's brain is not a miniature version of an adult brain. It is the ultimate "use it or lose it" contraption. As your baby receives repeated patterns of stimulation and experience, chemical activity producing change is taking place in her brain. Billions of microscopic neurons, called synapses, are making connections. These synapses are responsible for everything we do including learning, laughing, seeing, hearing, throwing a ball, loving and solving problems. They are even responsible for how we control our tempers and regulate other emotions.



Talking

Your baby will love to hear you talk to her. At first you may not know what to say or perhaps will feel silly or embarrassed talking to a baby. This really can be fun, and is an early step in both language and brain development. What you say isn't important as long as your voice communicates love, understanding, respect and affection. If you're wondering what to talk to your baby about, and how to talk to your baby, here are some suggestions:

- Talk to your baby about what you and she are doing.
 - “You're hungry aren't you?”
 - “You like to eat, don't you?”
 - “You're daddy's couch potato, aren't you?”
 - “It feels good when mommy washes your hair, doesn't it?”
 - “You don't want to get back in the stroller, do you?” ... “Okay, I'll carry you.”
 - “Do you want to bounce on my knee?...**BOUNCY! BOUNCY!**”
- Describe yourself or baby.
 - “You have the biggest brown eyes, don't you?”
 - “How many toes do you have?... **One, Two, Three**”.
 - “Daddy has big ears, doesn't he?”
 - “What do you think about mommy's shiny bracelets?...Would you like to play with one?”
 - “Grandma's lap is nice and soft, isn't it?...Is this your favorite place to sit?”
- Tell your baby nursery rhymes.
 - “Ba, Ba, Black Sheep have you any wool? Yes sir, yes sir, three bags full.”
- Sing songs you remember from your childhood or sing along with the radio.
- Describe what you see and hear around you.
 - “Do you hear the birds chirping?...The birdies say **PEEP, PEEP, PEEP**.”
 - “There's the big yellow garbage truck, it's **STINKY!**”
 - “You like the satin on the blanket, don't you?... Does it feel good when I rub it on your cheek?”
- Read to your baby holding her on your lap. Show her the pictures. Tell her about the picture, or read her one or two sentences from each page.
- Tell your baby how much you love him and what you like best about him.
 - “Mommy loves it when you smile. I just want to kiss you all the time.”
 - “I just love that chubby tummy!”
 - “You're the best cuddler, aren't you?”

playing

The best time to play with your baby is when she's quiet and alert. At that time, she's comfortable and relaxed and ready to pay attention to you. She can't pay attention and may be fussy and frustrated if she's tired or hungry.

Gentle, playful attention from you and anyone else caring for your baby is a building block in the development of her brain and body. Moms and dads play with babies differently, and therefore, stimulate different aspects of a baby's brain development.

Various types of play and stimulation result in brain connections being formed that influence a child's future capacity to learn and relate to others. So playing with your baby is not just play, it is essential work!

Smiling and talking to your baby while you are caring for her can turn routine tasks into stimulating and fun activities for your baby. Inventing little rituals and games to play with your baby as you bathe, dress or feed her, is the best way to start playing with your newborn. You can also play games you remember from your own childhood or games you've seen others play with infants like "This Little Piggy" and "Itsy Bitsy Spider." Newborns also enjoy looking at colorful objects and pictures. They will like it if these things make noise. Newborns see things best when they are held 8-12 inches from their eyes. Moving the toys slowly from side to side as your baby follows them will stimulate the development of her eyes and brain. Infants tire easily and can be overstimulated, so be sure to give your baby time to rest while playing.

When your baby is about three months old, he will begin to enjoy games like "Peek-a-Boo" and "Pat-A- Cake."

When you play with him, he will show you that he is tired or needs a rest by turning his head away, looking away, changing color, kicking his



Baby's Favorite Things



At 3 Months

Favorite Toy _____

Favorite Food _____

Favorite Way of Being Consoled _____

At 6 Months

Favorite Toy _____

Favorite Object _____

Favorite Food _____

Favorite Game _____

Favorite Way of Being Consoled _____

At 12 Months

Favorite Toy _____

Favorite Object _____

Favorite Food _____

Favorite Game _____

Favorite Way of Being Consoled _____

