



# FAMILY

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## Helping Babies Learn

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### Quick Facts...

Within the first few months of life, babies' neurons develop 1,000 trillion connections, 20 times the number present at birth.

Your baby's best environment includes social interaction: eye contact, talking, listening and touching.

Limit use of restrictive devices such as cribs, playpens, highchairs, infant seats and swings.

Encourage your baby to do everything he or she can for himself or herself.

Babies are happy with just a few toys; two or three at a time is just fine. Rotate toys every day or two for variety.

New insights into brain development suggest that as we care for babies the way in which we do so can have very important outcomes. Human development and learning are affected by nature and nurture. Nature is an individual's genetic make up and nurture is the surroundings, care, stimulation, teaching, and nutrition that are provided or withheld while a child is growing. The impact of nurturing factors on the young child's brain development is dramatic and specific, not only influencing general development, but actually affecting the intricate "wiring" (neurons) of the human brain.

Within the first few months of life, babies' neurons develop 1,000 trillion connections, 20 times the number present at birth. The more connections there are, the better a child will be at learning, remembering, planning, and carrying out tasks. These connections also influence the way a child thinks, feels and behaves. What we do the first five years can make a big difference in a child's development and future.



### Environment

Your baby's best environment includes social interaction: eye contact, talking, listening and touching. A consistent loving touch builds your baby's sense of trust. Plan a broad range of activities, i.e. trips to a park, walks, errands, contact with many people.

- Pay attention to your baby's individual interests. Observe while your baby explores and plays. Notice the types and levels of stimulation our baby enjoys, then act in a way that suits your child.
- Make your baby's world as stable as possible. Have routine and structure. Rituals such as a bedtime routine or using the same phrase or song every night can make the world seem stable and familiar.
- Take good care of yourself and be sure that your needs are met. When your needs are met, you are better able to care for your baby.

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## Resources

### Books

*Your Amazing Newborn*, by Marshall and Phyllis Klaus.

*Touchpoints, Your Child's Emotional and Behavioral Development*, by T. B. Brazelton.

*Your Baby's Mind*, by Dr. S.H. Jacob.

*Games to Play with Babies*, by Jackie Silberg.

*Magic Trees of the Mind*, by Marian Diamond & Janet Hopson.

*Building Your Baby's Brain*, U.S. Department of Education, 1-877-4ED-pubs.

### Videos

*Newborn basics*, Cambridge Education  
*Baby Steps*, Wood Knapp Video

*Child Development: The First Two Years*, V.I.E.W. Video

*Helping Babies Learn*. Ellen Coker 970-223-0128

### Web Sites

[www.fcs.uga.edu/extension/specialinitiatives/earlybraindev.html](http://www.fcs.uga.edu/extension/specialinitiatives/earlybraindev.html)

[www.zerotothree.org/brainwonders](http://www.zerotothree.org/brainwonders)

[www.iamyourchild.org](http://www.iamyourchild.org)

[www.nncc.org](http://www.nncc.org) (Click on child development, then brain development )

Web sites can be accessed at your public library.

### Callouts

Libraries, hospitals, county health departments, early childhood programs and community agencies are good sources of additional ideas for parents.

## Motor Development

- Provide a safe environment with freedom to explore
- Limit use of restrictive devices such as cribs, playpens, highchairs, infant seats and swings
- Allow babies many opportunities to initiate activities, with you following the lead of your baby
- Encourage independence, but carefully monitor your baby's activities for safety.
- Provide opportunities for babies to grasp and reach for objects.

## Emotional Development

- Respond to your baby each and every time he or she cries because neglecting a crying baby can produce brain wave patterns that dampen happy feelings.
- Be calm and relaxed, this transfers to your baby.
- Use infant massage from birth (caressing gentle touches), this enables your baby to learn self-calming techniques.
- Understand infant cues and respect your baby's feelings when he or she just wants to be left alone.
- Show positive facial expressions every time you interact with your baby.
- Be responsive to your baby.

## Hearing

- Have your baby's hearing tested at birth and regularly thereafter.
- Independently check hearing by holding objects that make different pitched sounds out of sight behind your child.
- Offer objects, such as rattles, that make a variety of differently pitched sounds.
- **TALK TALK TALK** to your baby during routine tasks and care to help develop and refine auditory skills.

## Vision

- Play games with your baby that involve slowly moving objects in a variety of positions to help stimulate vision connections in the brain.
- Provide numerous opportunities for your baby to have eye contact with a significant caregiver.
- Ask your pediatrician about getting an eye exam as early as possible.
- Include high contrast toys (black and white and red) and objects in your baby's environment.

## Vocabulary

- When your baby begins to babble, listen and repeat back his or her sounds.
- Talk to your baby, saying what you are going to do before you do it. “*I am going to pick you up*” Hold arms out for a verbal cue. “*I’m going to change your diaper.*” “*I’m going to give you a kiss.*” Then try saying only one word, “*UP*”. “*DOWN*”. “*KISS*”.
- As your baby gets older, recognize verbally what he or she is doing. “You found a ball.” “You chose the blue block.”
- As children begin to speak one or two words, expand their sentences, for example: when your infant asks for more, you can say “Do you want more?”
- Talk, sing, read books, tell stories, and describe what your baby is seeing, hearing, smelling, or touching everyday.



## Math & Logic

- Encourage your baby to do everything he or she can for himself or herself.
- Don’t help unless he or she shows frustration or asks for help.
- Provide opportunities for stacking, dumping, feeling and sorting objects.
- Play counting games.
- Play Peek a Boo games.
- Hide objects underneath a cloth and ask, “Where did it go?”
- Do allow your baby to experiment and problem solve.
- Ask open ended questions.
- Play music often.

## Music and Songs

You don’t have to be a star to enjoy the pleasure of singing to your baby. Make up your own tunes and sing about objects in the room, on car trips, or while cooking.

Wherever you are, whatever you are doing can become a song. Words do not have to rhyme. Talking and singing about tasks presents a positive attitude and an opportunity to share with your baby. Bedtime is a good time to sing to your baby. Sing this song to the tune of Good Night Ladies.

*Good night, (use child’s name)*

Good night, \_\_\_\_\_

Good night, \_\_\_\_\_

It’s time to go to sleep.

Sleep tight, \_\_\_\_\_

Sleep tight, \_\_\_\_\_

Sleep tight, \_\_\_\_\_

*Time to close your eyes.*

Sing songs in different voices, sometimes high, then low. Change baby’s position as you sing: over one shoulder, then the other.

## Rhymes and Games

Your baby enjoys your voice and the rhythm of your words. Don't worry about remembering the exact words; your own words and actions are just fine.

Gently exercise your baby's arms and legs while singing this rhyme to the tune of This Old Man.

*Exercise, exercise,  
We are doing exercise  
With a tap, tap, clap, clap  
We are having fun  
(Child's name) is number one.*

- Lie on the floor and let your baby crawl over you; grab your baby suddenly and roll to your side, protecting your baby from bumps. Have fun.
- Take your baby on a texture walk around the house or yard. Let your baby feel textures as you describe them.
- Get on the floor with your crawling baby. Hide a musical toy partially behind a chair. Ask your baby, "where is the toy?" Crawling, look for it in a couple of places, responding each time, "No, the toy isn't there." Then make a big deal of finding the toy. Babies will enjoy doing this over and over. They will delight in finding it themselves.

### Safety Notes

*While mouthing is normal and a great way for a baby to learn and explore, it is important to remember:*

- *No toys or objects less than 1 : inches in diameter. If it can fit in a toilet paper tube, it is too small.*
- *No sharp edges, balloons, or toys with paint or foam that can flake off when mouthed.*
- *Check string on beads for strength.*
- *Long, soft foods, such as bananas or hot dogs should be sliced lengthwise before being given to a toddler to eat, to avoid choking.*

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*Information adapted from Helping Babies Learn video insert developed by Ellen Coker and Sonia Nornes.*

## Toys

Babies are happy with just a few toys; two or three at a time is just fine. Rotate toys every day or two for variety.

Choose toys that fit your baby's personality and developmental level. Select balls, blocks, rattles, stacking objects and books that your baby can manipulate for him or herself with supervision.

Arrange toys and objects around the room and let your baby explore, finding new objects. Make a drawer in the kitchen, (which is closest to the floor), for the "baby drawer" with a variety of objects for your baby to play with. He or she will learn how to open and close the drawer quickly. Change objects every couple of days for surprise/variety.

Glue photos of family, friends or pets on index cards. Photos can be laminated to protect them.

Punch a hole in one or two corners of each card and thread string, yarn or any sturdy cord through all the holes to bind the cards into a book. Identify each person until baby is familiar with them. Ask baby to find a certain picture, "Where is Mommy?", etc.

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