



About Babies

It's a girl! It's a boy! Now what?

During the first few months of a baby's life is when they develop attachments to their primary caregivers. This usually happens naturally when their needs are met. Babies need to be kept fed, warm, clean, comfortable, and safe. They need to sleep when tired. They need love, human contact and interaction, such as cuddling, being held, played with, read to, and talked to in a gentle voice when awake.

Why do babies cry?

Crying is how babies communicate when they are hungry, thirsty, too hot or cold, tired, afraid, lonely, in pain, feeling ill, have a dirty diaper, or are receiving too much stimulation, such as bright lights or loud noises. They do not know their crying can be stressful. They only know, instinctively, that crying gets them what they need to survive or feel better.



Babies will not become spoiled if you quickly comfort them when they are upset. In fact, they will learn to love and trust you, and that the world is a safe place. Try different things to find what makes your baby feel better, such as rocking, singing, music, removing or adding layers of clothing, or giving him a teething ring.

Yelling at, ignoring, spanking, or handling babies roughly when they are crying can be physically and emotionally harmful. Since babies do not understand how their actions may negatively affect others, they do not understand "punishment." Punishing a baby will make them afraid when they need to be developing positive relationships with their caregivers. Parents can still start teaching their babies consequences of their actions, though. For example, if your 6-month old kicks his feet, thereby accidentally bumping you, say in a gentle voice, "No, that hurts." However, s/he will not learn what this means for many months.

Feeling frustrated is natural for parents of newborns, especially when nothing seems to stop them from wailing. However, when feeling overwhelmed, see if someone can give you a break. Or, put your baby in a safe place until you can get control of your emotions.

The creation of this tip sheet was inspired by a variety of sources, including www.families.qld.gov.au - a Web site for families based out of Queensland, Australia; the American SIDS Institute at www.sids.org; Zero to Three at www.zerotothree.org; National Safe Kids Campaign at www.safekids.org; U.S. Product Safety Commission at www.cpsc.gov; Consumer Federation of America at www.safekid.net; and National Network for Child Care at www.nncc.org.

Separation anxiety

Around 6-8 months, babies may suddenly start crying when you leave them - even when you exit the room. This is because their brains have developed and they now realize they are separate beings from others. When they can not see those they are attached to, it causes worry or stress. Sometimes babies this age become harder to put to bed because they do not yet understand their parents will be there when they wake. This normal part of human development is called **separation anxiety**. Over time, babies learn that you always come back and start feeling safe in your absence.

Easing separation anxiety

Never "sneak out" on a child. Though this may seem easier, it compromises trust, making leaving more difficult in the future. Always say goodbye.

Play games such as peek-a-boo. This gets your baby used to you "disappearing" and "reappearing."

When necessary, have someone your baby knows care for him, such as a grandparent.

Building Babies' Self Esteem & Learning

Babies learn to feel good about themselves when people shower them with love and positive attention and when they learn to do things, such as successfully grabbing a toy or making a noise by banging objects together. Provide opportunities for your baby to learn:

Very young babies (0-2 months) are still developing their sense of sight. They can see best when objects or people are 9-12 inches from their face. Look at and talk to babies from this distance. If they look away, take this as a signal that they need a break.



Hand babies (2-3 months+) soft rattles to shake. Older babies can bang on objects, such as plastic bowls with a wooden spoon. Associate words to the sounds they make, such as "bang, bang, tap, tap."

When babies are old enough to hold their head up, lay them on their stomach with toys slightly out of reach. Encourage them to touch and grab the toys.

Show babies you are happy to be around them. Read and play simple games with them. Talk to your baby frequently - during feedings, diaper changes, baths, walks outside, etc. They are rapidly learning language and how to be social - the more you talk, the better!

Turn the page for more!



About Babies...continued

Staying safe & healthy

Babies do not understand danger and may not be able to move from harmful situations. Caregivers must provide a safe environment at all times.

- ◆ Check your home for dangerous objects such as small, chokable objects (coins, pieces of older children's toys, etc.); medicines, household cleaners, or other hazardous materials, and put them out of their reach.
- ◆ Make sure staircases are blocked with gates.
- ◆ Keep your baby away from tobacco smoke.
- ◆ Check for product safety. The U.S. Product Safety Commission (www.cpsc.gov) has a list of recalled toys and clothing. Also, the Consumer Federation of America has launched a Web site (www.safechild.net) to increase awareness of safety risks to children. This site has a database of hundreds of recalled products.



- ◆ In Massachusetts, children under five years old **and** who weigh less than 40 pounds must be properly secured in a safety seat in the car. Babies under a year old should ride rear-facing in the back seat with the top of his head one inch or more from the top of the safety seat's shell. Never put a rear-facing car seat in the front where a deployed air bag can cause harm. The Web site www.safekids.org has tips on making sure car seats are installed properly.

- ◆ Ask your pediatrician about immunizations and other health issues.

Bathing

Always make sure your baby is watched by an adult while in the bath. Never substitute your eyes for commercial "bath seats" that promise to hold babies up in the tub. Many of these seats have been recalled by manufacturers due to accidental drownings. Let the machine get the phone during bath time.

- ◆ Avoid bathing babies when they are hungry or upset.
- ◆ Use soaps and shampoos designed for babies - they tend to be gentler and will not irritate eyes.
- ◆ Babies' skin is far more sensitive to heat than adults. Make sure the bath water is lukewarm to prevent burns.



Feeding

- ✿ Always hold your baby when bottle feeding. Propping a bottle with blankets or other objects can cause choking. Plus, babies need human contact during feedings.



- ✿ Check with the pediatrician on when to start feeding your baby solid food, and how to introduce new foods while watching for allergies.



Sleeping

Research has shown that taking the following precautions reduces the chance of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS):

- ☐ Put young babies to sleep on their backs.
- ☐ Be aware of things that can smother. Keep pillows, stuffed animals, and toys out of cribs. Never cover your baby's head with a blanket when sleeping. Make sure bedding is firm and blankets are not too heavy or thick.
- ☐ Do not put your child to sleep in a bean bag chair or water bed.
- ☐ Make sure pets stay out of the baby's room.
- ☐ Do not overdress you baby for bed. Overheating your baby may increase the risk of SIDS, according to the American SIDS Institute. Keep the room at a temperature that is comfortable to you.

Babies like to touch anything they can get their little hands on. Keep cribs away from curtain or electrical cords, heaters, outlets, and other hazardous objects.

Avoid giving babies bottles to take to bed, since it can cause your baby's teeth to rot.

Help for parents

Having a baby is life-changing, and with the joys of parenthood oftentimes comes stress. Sleeping schedules are thrown into flux, personal time becomes non-existent, or older children get jealous of the time devoted to the baby. In rare instances, new moms suffer from post-partum depression, a disorder associated with the chemical imbalances that can occur after birth. Having a child with a difficult temperament, colic, or disabilities can leave new parents feeling especially overwhelmed. Remember, you are not the only one out there who may be struggling to adapt. It does not mean you are a failure as a parent! It is important that you talk to someone, such as your doctor, family, or friends about how you are feeling and ask for extra support.

Parent Stress Line: 1-800-632-8188

Parents Helping Parents: 1-800-882-1250