

## The Development of Your Baby's Mind

One of the first things your baby learns to do is pay attention to people and things. The world may be kind of scary for a new baby. There is noise, light, smells, textures, tastes and temperatures. Your baby must learn to understand all of these things. At the same time, your baby also starts to move and control their arms and legs.

As your baby grows and develops, they start to notice all the things around them. Your baby will start to watch and follow objects. They will also start to recognize sounds and sights.

### What can I do to help my baby?

- **Help your baby feel safe and loved.** Security is important to your baby's healthy development. You should start to know how your baby responds to different feelings. Look at the kinds of things your baby likes or things that upset them.
  - Does your baby like being gently bounced on your knee?
  - Do bright lights or being tickled bother or scare your baby?
  - Does your baby show interest when you smile, sing or talk?
- Pay attention and do what your baby likes. It will make it more enjoyable and interesting for both of you.

### How do I bond with my baby?

- As babies are able to focus on things, they are ready to interact with other people. By the age of 3 to 4 months, your baby likes spending time with you. Building a loving relationship with an adult is very important for a baby. This type of loving relationship with you and other caring people helps your baby develop many feelings. These feelings include delight and anger; fear and sadness; compassion and love.
- Try different ways to get your baby to interact with you.
  - Blow gently on your baby's cheek.
  - Gently massage your baby with lotion.
  - Talk, hum or sing quietly to your baby.
  - Hold your baby close and dance.



## How will my baby communicate?

- From age 4 months to 10 months, your baby learns a lot. Your baby starts to see that actions cause reactions. This is an early form of logic. Your baby also starts to realize there is a two-way exchange between people. For example, when your baby stretches out their arms, you are likely to pick up your baby.
- As a result, your baby knows it is possible to affect what happens around them. Your baby will make faces or use a hand to reach for something. When you are able to read these signals you can help your baby get what they want. Your baby will then feel good because you understood them.
- If the signals invite a return response, take the time to give it. For example, repeat a sound that your baby has made or try to get your baby to pass a rattle back and forth with you. These things will help your baby understand the concepts of me and you. It also helps your baby feel safe and secure because they are understood.
- Remember, your baby doesn't have words yet. Instead, your baby will use actions. They may point, grunt or use other gestures.

## Communicating in a more advanced way

- By the end of the first year and into the early part of the second year of life, your baby will be able to hold longer conversations. Babies learn to demand attention with just a look. If you ask where or what, your baby may take your hand, pull you into the kitchen and pat the refrigerator. As your baby points and you ask a question, they might make a sound or nod or laugh. This helps you figure out that your baby wants a snack!
- At the same time, your baby learns to read your emotions and body language just as you read theirs. Body language helps your baby understand a situation. For example, your baby will watch you when you talk to a stranger. Your baby will respond to the stranger based on the body language you show. Learning the patterns of behavior and emotions of people fascinates your baby. Your baby will learn that certain behaviors can cause other behaviors.
- Respond to your baby in a way that meets their changing needs. Make them feel safe and secure. This will help your baby learn that they and others need care, attention and respect.

## Forming ideas

- Between 18 and 24 months of age, a baby starts to talk. Thoughts become more complex. For example, your baby can think of the color and taste and smell of his favorite juice. Instead of just pointing to an empty cup, your baby will start to say "me juice" or "juice now!" This type of thought lets your baby label feelings, too.
- Instead of kicking or throwing something when angry, your baby may start to say, "mad!" Your baby will also start to act, or role play. They may make a teddy bear wave bye-bye when you leave for work or make two dolls hug. Join in this interactive play.
- Ask questions that your baby can answer to make conversations last longer. For example, if your baby says, "Me go outside," you could say "OK" or "Not now," but it might be better to say "what do you want to do outside?" This helps your baby think about what they want. Your baby will learn to love talking to you as well.

## From the heart

- By the time your baby is 2 years old, you will have helped them develop a detailed picture of the world. Your responses to your baby's early cues have now changed to talking between you and your child. This helps your child express more complex ideas and may be considered "thinking." Your child's feelings help them learn and master concepts. The simple statement, "ball," soon becomes "want ball." And later becomes, "I want the ball."
- Your child can now imagine stories, play pretend adventures, or even pretend to be someone else. They can imagine behaviors. Later they can carry those behaviors out.
- Provide a loving and safe environment for your child. This can help your child grow from a baby who needs your constant attention to a person who can do and feel many things.



Adapted from The Growth of the Mind by Stanley I. Greenspan MD and Beryl Lieff Benderley (Addison-Wesley) as printed in "How Love Boosts Brainpower," *Parents*, February 1997, pp. 88-89.

**ALERT:** Call your child's doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any questions or concerns or if your child has special health care needs that were not covered by this information.

**This teaching sheet is meant to help you care for your child. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up.**