

Baby's First Wish

New Mexico State University
Cooperative Extension Service

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AN EXTENSION Just in Time Parenting[®] NEWSLETTER



What Is Your Baby Like?

Your baby is one of a kind. Babies are different in many ways:



Rhythms Some babies eat, sleep, and even have bowel movements about the same time each day. Others never do the same thing from one day to the next.



Approach or withdrawal Some babies shy away from new things, while others seek them out.



Adaptability Some babies won't take their formula if it isn't the right temperature. Some babies can sleep only in their own cribs. Others do fine no matter where they are or with whom.



Intensity of Reaction Some babies whimper quietly when they're cold or hungry. Others howl as soon as they are unhappy.



Level of Responsiveness Some babies notice the tiniest change around them. Others can sleep through thunderstorms.

All of these things make up your baby's temperament or personality. Some combinations are easier to live with than others.

Some babies are active and predictable. They adapt easily to change and are usually happy.

Some babies pull away from new things a little and adapt slowly to change.

Some babies tend to be unpredictable and hard to comfort. They have a hard time with new situations and it takes them a long time to get used to change.

If your baby is hard to comfort, know: Your baby is not doing this on purpose and is not bad. He can grow up to be as bright and loving as others. Your baby was born with this style of adapting, but it may change as he grows. This kind of baby needs caring and patient parents who will accept him and help him learn.



To help a baby who has a hard time dealing with new situations:

Introduce things slowly, so he gets accustomed to them. Pay attention to your baby's signals, and watch how he reacts to the world. Over time, you will figure out how much change and activity are right for your baby. This style of adapting, which makes your baby seem hard to comfort, may help him when he is older. It may help him think for himself and not go along with the crowd.

What's It Like to Be 5 Months Old?



How I Grow and Talk

- I rock, roll, and twist my body.
- I kick my feet and suck on my toes.
- I keep my head and back straight when I sit if you support my body.
- If you hold me under my arms, I stand up, jump up and down, and stamp my feet.
- I have pretty good aim when I grab at something.
- I can roll from my tummy to my back, and I may be able to roll from my back to my tummy.
- I watch your mouth and try to imitate you when you talk to me.
- I make sounds such as ee, ah, ooh, and maybe da, pa, ma, ba.
- I babble to myself, to my toys, and to people — I get attention that way!

How I Respond

- I look around when I hear sounds.
- I may cry when I see strangers.
- I look for something if I drop it.
- I stop crying when you talk to me.
- I usually cling to you when you hold me.
- I have my good days and my bad days — just as everyone does.

How I Understand and Feel

- I recognize my name.
- I can tell the difference between me and others in the mirror.
- I remember what I just did.

How I Understand and Feel

- I am very interested in toys that can be touched and chewed on. I like to twist, shake, and bang my toys.
- As I play, I learn what it means to be near and far. I also learn about inside and outside.
- As I play and explore, I learn about the world.
- I am starting to show fear, anger, and disgust. It doesn't mean I'm bad, it just means I'm growing into a normal person with many emotions.
- I'm beginning to be aware of my feelings. I notice your feelings, facial expressions, and body language.

Child Guidance: Discipline and Safety

Your baby has lots of energy. It seems as if he is always on the move. You may need extra patience to keep up with him. Your baby is starting to get into things you may not want him to have. Because everything he picks up goes into his mouth, it's time to think about safety.

Babies under 1 year old are too young to understand why they should stop doing something. Your baby may love to throw toys on the floor. He likes to hear the noise and watch the toys bounce. To him, it's a game. Your baby doesn't drop things to annoy or "test" you. He's learning where things go when they drop.

Put away things that are dangerous or could break and hurt your baby. Baby proofing will simplify your life if you take the time to do it now. Read all about baby proofing your house later in the newsletter.

Your baby needs and wants to explore. So it makes sense to baby proof your house, rather than having to follow him around saying no to everything he does. That approach is exhausting for you and upsetting for your baby, who learns by touching and exploring.

Another form of teaching is redirection. This means moving your baby away from a hazard, such as a lamp cord, and moving him to a safe place.



You can substitute things to teach your baby. For example, find a different drawer in the kitchen that is OK for your baby to empty. Then gently remove the thing you don't want him to have. As you take it away, say something like, "This could hurt you."

Do not slap your baby's hands or yell at him. Your baby can't control his behavior yet. If you spank him, he learns that it is OK to hit. It's your job to keep him out of danger, not to punish him for getting into it.

If you can set limits, and at the same time provide loving care, and have a sense of humor, you will help your baby grow up with a good head on his shoulders.

Get More Information if You're Worried

Sometimes parents wonder if there are signs that their baby is not developing normally. There are lists of warning signs, or red flags (as some people call them), to help you find out if your baby is developing normally. To get more information on these warning signs, talk to your doctor or go to this web site: http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/ActEarly/milestones_3months.html





Help Your Baby Learn About His Body



Help your baby discover his feet.

- Rub his feet together.
- Bring his feet to his mouth.
- Count his toes.

Say, "This little piggy went to market (wiggling the big toe). This little piggy stayed home (wiggling the next toe). This little piggy ate roast beef for dinner (wiggling the third toe). This little piggy had none (wiggling the fourth toe). And this little piggy cried wee, wee, wee, all the way home (wiggling the littlest toe)."

Help your baby discover his hands.

- Rub his hands together.
- Bring his hands to his mouth.
- Count his fingers.

Help him clap his hands together. Do hand games such as patty cake. Clap your baby's hands as you say, "Patty cake, patty cake, baker's man. Bake me a cake as fast as you can. (Pat hands on lap.) Pat it and roll it (move hands in a circle) and mark it with a B (draw the letter B with the hand). Put it in the oven for baby and me (pulling hands away from your baby)."

Take time to laugh together!

Games Babies Play

Difficult Sounds: A Communication Game

Purpose of game: to encourage your baby to imitate sounds and words. Repeat the sounds your baby makes so she can hear them twice. As you say these sounds back to your baby, you are helping her learn how to make the sounds she has "invented."

How to play: Hold your baby in your arms and let her relax. Make sounds such as "brr-own," "grrr-ate," "bizzz-y," "uh-oh," and "aaa-all gone." Face her so she can watch your lips move. Nuzzle or cuddle her after you make the sounds. Laugh, smile, or hug her gently when she makes the sounds.

If your baby still wants to play, try new words and sounds. Face your baby so she can see you say other words and sounds.





Feeding Your Baby

Between 5 and 6 months of age, several things begin to happen. Your baby's growth will begin to slow down. He will become more active and burn more calories.

Your doctor is probably telling you to not start solid foods for another month or two. Your friends and relatives are probably telling you that everyone starts solids sooner. Pay attention to your doctor. Breast milk is best. Keep up the breast milk and/or the infant formula your doctor has recommended. If you don't already have a breastfeeding support group, check out the La Leche League at <http://la-lecheleague.org/>.

Help your baby learn to eat when he is hungry and to stop eating when he begins to feel full.

Hungry babies may:

- Open their mouths when they see the breast or bottle
- Lean forward to be able to drink

Babies who start to feel full may:

- Hold their mouths tightly shut
- Push away the breast or bottle
- Lose interest in eating
- Turn their upper body away

No Honey, Honey!

Babies under 1 year old should not be fed honey. Honey is harmful to babies because it has spores that can cause infant botulism.

Read Books to Your Baby

Your baby likes to look at brightly colored pictures in books. Point to the pictures of items as you read to your baby. Make up your own short story about pictures you see on a page of a book or a magazine.

Helping Your Baby's Memory

Watch what your baby does when things disappear from view. Does she lean over to look for things she dropped? Does she look for a favorite toy?

These are signs that your baby's memory is growing. When she was younger, out of sight was out of mind. Now, she is learning that things exist even when she can't see them.

You can have fun with your baby and help her memory at the same time. Show your baby a toy, and then cover it — slowly at first — with a cloth or cup. Does your baby try to pull the cover off? What if you cover only part of the toy? Try different toys and different covers.

Play peek-a-boo to help your baby learn that you come back when you go away. Sometimes cover your face and sometimes hers. If your baby doesn't have fun playing these games now, wait a few weeks and try again.

Child Toy Safety Alert



Now is the time to remove crib toys that fit across the crib. When babies can push up on their hands and knees, sometime around 5 months of age, they can fall over a toy in the crib and not be able to get free. This could cause a baby to strangle.

Hooded shirts, toys, or anything with strings can also cause strangling, so keep these things away from your baby.



It's Time to Baby Proof Your Home

Your baby wants to move, climb, open things, and poke around in small spaces. She does not understand how dangerous things can be.

There are many reasons to baby proof:

- It helps your baby avoid accidents and injuries.
- It gives your baby a large area to safely explore, which helps her learn.
- You won't have to keep saying no.
- It keeps your valued items safe.

How to baby proof:

- Get down on the floor and crawl around. Look carefully at everything in the rooms where your baby goes. Create a safe area for your baby to play.
- Cover all electrical outlets.
- Put small items such as matches, nails, and tiny beads out of sight.
- Move chemicals such as cleaning products and bug killers to high, out-of-reach shelves.
- Keep all medicines out of reach.
- Install childproof locks on cabinets that hold items you don't want your baby to have.
- Use new gates to block off stairs and other places you don't want your baby to play. Old-fashioned accordion gates are dangerous. Your baby can be trapped in the gate.

Until you have a safe play area, borrow or buy a playpen or new gate. Playpens work well with some babies, while other babies cry the minute they're put into one. If you do use a playpen, be sure it has a spring lock and no hinges or joints that can pinch tiny fingers. Do not keep your baby in the playpen long; she will get tired of it and it keeps her from safely exploring and learning.

What Happened to Time for Us?

“Ever since we had the baby, there’s been a lot of strain between my partner and me. We never seem to have time just to sit and talk anymore. I can’t seem to tell him how I feel. Things really seem to be piling up between us.”

Many parents feel this way. With all the demands that a new baby adds to your busy life, it’s difficult to find time to sit down, talk, and make a plan for working together. Even though it’s difficult, it’s important to find the time to talk about what’s bothering you.

Chances are that your partner also has been storing up some gripes. Set up a date or set aside a special time each week that you can be together and talk without being interrupted.

Use “I messages.” Tell each other how you feel, without placing blame. Instead of saying, “You always put me down” say, “I feel put down when you tell me...” By using “I messages,” your partner will not feel blamed or accused and is likely to be more interested in addressing the problem.

Be direct. Say what you mean, rather than hoping your partner can guess or know what you mean. In-

stead of saying, “The living room looks messy” say, “I get upset when the newspapers are all over the room, and I have to pick them up.”

Avoid the question trap. Instead of saying, “Why didn’t you call to tell me you’d be late?” say, “I was worried that something had happened to you when you didn’t come home at the usual time. Next time, please call me, so I won’t worry.”

When you find yourself ready to ask a question or place blame, identify what you are really feeling. Then send an “I message” instead.

Listen, listen, and listen! Give your partner a chance to air his or her feelings and gripes. Don’t interrupt, jump to conclusions, preach, or quickly offer advice. Check back to see if you really

understood what was said. For example say, “Let me see if I understand...” or “Are you saying that...?”

These skills will be helpful as you parent your baby. You may not agree with each other about how to discipline your baby. One of you may want to distract the baby from dangerous objects, while the other may believe in yelling at the baby. These are issues to be worked out by talking them through and using the skills listed above.



Do Yourself a Favor

Some parents make a regular date to be with other parents and babies. Babies enjoy these play groups. Parents may enjoy them even more! You may be able to use each other for emergency baby-sitting, too.

All parents have days when their babies wear them out. It helps to have a

friend you can call on for an hour or so if you need to run an errand or when you just need time alone.



To raise a baby, you need help. Is there someone in your neighborhood who loves babies? Are there new parents nearby who might like to join a play group?

Want to Learn More?

For an online version of this newsletter go to www.extension.org and choose parenting.

If you have questions, contact your local Extension office.

When reading this newsletter, remember: Every baby is different. Children may do things earlier or later than described here. This newsletter gives equal space and time to both sexes. If he or she is used, we are talking about all babies.

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Cooperative Extension Service
MSC 3AE
New Mexico State University
P.O. Box 30003
Las Cruces, NM 88003-8003
