



# What Babies and Very Young Children Need Most

From the very start, children grow and thrive in stable nurturing relationships. These relationships are with the people who love and care for them the most—parents, siblings, grandparents and other family members, and child care teachers. These early relationships form the foundation for all of the child’s development.

## Responsive caregiving

The first year of life forms the basis for trust and security. Children do best in homes where their needs are met, where they receive comfort when upset, and where they are loved and encouraged. Babies learn about themselves from those who care for them—especially their parents. It starts early. Babies notice your facial expression, they hear the tone and volume of your voice—it tells them whether or not they are in a safe, secure loving place. Even if they cannot understand the words, they understand the tone.

When babies are treated with love and kindness and encouraged to do things by themselves they learn to be confident and feel good about themselves. They become more willing and able to try new things and learn.

### MESSAGES THAT **SUPPORT** BABY’S FEELINGS

#### What you do

You check out why he is crying and comfort him.

#### What baby learns

Baby learns that his needs are important too.

You give him time to move and explore what is around him.

Baby learns that he is powerful and can make things happen.

“Let’s try that again. Do you need help?”

Baby learns to try new skills; develops a sense of accomplishment. Baby feels proud.

### MESSAGES THAT **DISCOURAGE** BABY’S FEELINGS

#### What you do

You ignore his crying.

#### What baby learns

Baby learns that his needs aren’t met no matter what he does.

You tell him to sit still and stop touching everything.

Baby learns that curiosity is bad.

You don’t let him try to walk or feed himself. “You are too little or will make a mess.”

Baby learns not to try – that he is not capable.

## Delight

More than anything, young children are looking for a grownup to smile, talk, and in some way show them that they are happy to see them and are interested in what they are doing. Even babies do this as they start cooing and laughing.

Sing softly as you rock her to sleep.  
Kiss her toes as you change her diaper.





## Know Your Baby

Young children don't have words so they need the grownups in their world to read their facial expressions and other cues, and to respond quickly and with love. Understanding babies' cues sometimes isn't easy to figure out. You will need to figure out how your baby likes to be held, what position helps her burp, signs that she is tired, cues of when there is too much noise, when she is hungry or full, or feeling too hot or too cold. "I see you turning your head away from the food. Are you all done?"

Help her learn your cues too. Talk to her softly before you are going to touch her. Babies startle easily, especially if they don't see you coming. Describe what you are going to do—"I am changing your diaper now." "Let's go lay down for a nap." Your baby doesn't understand the words but she recognizes your voice and will be comforted by it.

## Can't Spoil Your Baby

You cannot spoil your baby by picking him up when he cries. When your baby is crying, pick him up and hold him. Being held and cuddled helps your baby learn to soothe himself and feel more secure. This will help him learn to do things on his own when he is older.

## Serve & Return

Young children love "shared reading"—the child points, the adult describes, the child looks or babbles and points to the next page, communicating back and forth. Or the baby smiles and the mom smiles back. Dad makes a funny face and the baby laughs harder. This important back and forth way of talking is called "serve and return" and it is very important for the brain to be healthy and able to learn.

## Support in Calming Down

We all need to be comforted at times. Babies do too, but sometimes they need help to calm down. Comforting doesn't spoil your baby. Some children are easy to comfort—others are more difficult. Some naturally suck their fingers, hold their blankie, or self soothe. Others need help by rubbing their back to go to sleep, or need a pacifier. Things to try—sing to him, talk in a calm voice, hold him close, give him a cuddle toy.

Parenting young children can be frustrating **and** rewarding. There's no more important job than supporting your child to develop positive strategies for dealing with life's frustrations. Your nurturing guidance and support will provide a lifelong foundation for healthy and positive behaviors for your child.

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