

You & Your Baby



Having a baby changes your life. There is a new little person to get to know, love and care for. New mums and dads may not have had a lot to do with babies until their first comes along and can have strong feelings they were not expecting. The most important thing is to believe in yourself and enjoy this special time with your baby. Most parents learn about babies and work things out as they go along.

Baby's feelings and brain

In the first months of life your baby is in a very strange world they know nothing about.

- Babies need to learn that the world is safe and there are people who will look after them
- They learn this when you give them food, comfort, warmth, smiles and cuddles. They learn to love you and trust you and that they are lovable.

Your baby's brain is growing faster now than at any other time of life. Billions of cells are expanding, connecting and building pathways to thousands of others. Their 'brain wiring' is being laid down for the future. What they experience every day causes connections and pathways to develop.

- When babies feel loved, safe and secure the connections for feeling good and learning are strengthened.
- When you talk to baby, smile and look into their eyes, the connections for talking, learning, thinking and all the other things they will need are strengthened too.
- When baby feels unhappy or stressed a lot of the time, or is not touched, noticed or talked to, the connections that react to stress are strengthened. As baby grows they may be less able to learn and develop their best.

Did you know that babies...

- love it when you smile, talk and play with them
- communicate from birth using their own special signals
- learn from what they feel, see and hear every day
- grow best when they feel loved, safe and secure.

When babies feel loved they learn to love you too.

Baby's relationships

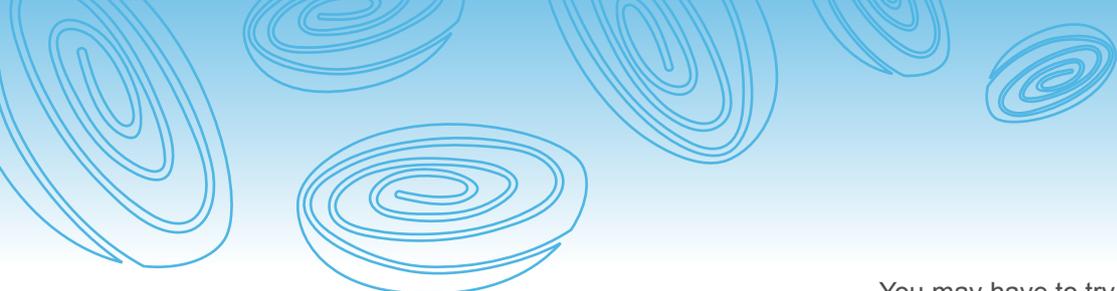
Babies grow and develop their best if they have someone they are very close to in the first year. This is called 'attachment' or 'bonding'.

- Babies learn how to respond and what to expect in future relationships. This is why these first relationships are so important.
- Babies can learn to know other people but it's best if most of the caring comes from a few people without too many changes.

Positive early relationships and opportunities to be curious and explore also provide the building blocks for learning and help children:

- develop confidence, emotional control and the skills to get along with others
- make the most of learning during the school years.

Babies who have loving early relationships are better able to cope with stress as they grow up.



Baby's signals

Babies communicate in their own special way from birth. They give little signals and cries to show their feelings and needs. These can be small and subtle or quite obvious.

- When babies feel good they may make eye contact, little noises, smile, copy your gestures, look relaxed and interested.
- To show they need a break or a different approach babies may look away, shut their eyes, struggle or pull away, yawn, look tense and unsettled or cry.

When you respond to baby's signals you are building your bond with them. It lets them know they have been heard. It is the start of two-way communication and learning to talk.

Why babies cry

Crying is important for babies. It is how they let you know they need something. They might:

- be hungry, thirsty, too hot or cold
- be frightened, bored or lonely
- need a cuddle or closeness with you
- need a nappy change
- be unwell or have pain, e.g. tummy ache or earache.

Responding to babies

It is important to respond promptly and warmly when your baby is upset. Babies:

- learn to feel safe and secure and to trust you
- settle better and cry less in the long run. When you soothe babies they get better at soothing themselves
- learn that the world is safe. They can relax and learn their best. No one can learn when stressed, afraid or crying.

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You can't 'spoil' babies by going to them when they cry. You can harm them by not responding to their needs.

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You may have to try a few things until you work out what baby needs. You could try:

- holding them close if they are frightened or lonely
- holding them upright against your shoulder if they are uncomfortable
- rocking them in your arms or in a pram
- finding out what they like, e.g. a dummy, soft music or a ticking clock.

If you are worried call the Parent Helpline on 1300 364 100, Lismore Community Health (02) 6620 2967 or your local doctor

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As you get to know your baby you will learn what helps them and what doesn't.

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What babies can do

Right from the start most babies can:

- feel, see, hear, taste and smell
- suck to feed
- move their arms and legs - although they cannot yet control their movements
- detect and react to the tone of your voice and the gentleness of your touch.

Seeing

Most babies can see quite well at birth, especially things that are close. They can see:

- your face and will soon recognise you
- things that are further away but they will be blurry - distance vision takes time to develop
- different colours.

In the first few weeks a baby's eyes often cross or wander in different directions. By three months their eyes should be 'lined up' so they both look at the same object. If you are concerned talk with your doctor or child health nurse.

Hearing

- Most babies have been hearing since well before birth. They are familiar with mum's voice and may recognise other voices too.



- Your baby's hearing will usually be checked at the hospital soon after birth. Talk with your doctor or child health nurse if you are not sure whether this has been done.

Your baby will be calmed by soft noises and startled by sudden, loud noises.

Smell and taste

- Babies can tell different tastes such as salty, sweet, sour and bitter and react to unpleasant tastes such as some medicines.
- They do not need salt or sugar on their foods when starting solids. They learn to like the tastes they are given.

Touch

- Babies are sensitive to touch and can feel pain. Gentle, caring touch is very important so babies feel loved and cared for.
- Some babies enjoy gentle stroking or a massage.

Reflexes

Most of a newborn baby's movements are random and they are not able to control them at first. These are called reflexes and include:

- the startle reflex - baby's arms stretch out, their back arches and head goes back
- the grasp reflex – baby grips things put onto the palm of their hand, such as your finger
- the rooting reflex – baby turns towards and sucks on something that touches their face
- sucking on things that are put into their mouth. Babies need to suck to survive – many babies find it very soothing
- the 'tongue thrust' reflex – babies push things out of their mouth with their tongue, e.g. when starting solid foods. It doesn't mean they don't like the food - they need to learn to control their tongue.

These reflexes will reduce over the next few months as babies develop.

Development in the first year

All babies are different but they usually follow a similar pattern of development. Your baby might:

by 8 weeks:

- smile at you when you smile at them
- lift their head up when lying on their tummy
- kick both legs strongly

by 3 - 6 months

- chuckle and laugh aloud
- turn their head towards a person talking by 5 months
- reach for an object and hold it briefly

by 6 - 9 months

- know familiar people and be wary of strangers
- delight in playing 'peek-a-boo' games
- sit for a few minutes without using their hands for support

9 - 12 months

- become anxious if main carer is out of sight
- find a toy hidden under a cloth
- sit unsupported
- pull themselves up to stand
- walk while holding on to furniture.

Every baby is different even in the same family. Your baby might do things faster, slower or differently from others and this is usually OK. If your baby is doing things much more slowly or not doing some things at all, it is important to talk with your doctor or child health nurse to make sure all is well.



Separation anxiety

Babies from about six months can remember you when you are not there. They may cry because they want you. This is called separation anxiety. It is a normal part of learning they are a separate person. Often babies will wake at night or be harder to put to bed because they miss you and don't yet understand you always come back.

You can help baby develop trust in you by:

- always letting them know when you are leaving - wave goodbye and let them know when you are back
- playing games such as peek-a-boo to help them get used to your going and coming
- leaving them only with people they know well and feel safe with.

What parents can do to help babies develop

It is important to think of your baby as a unique person with their own likes and dislikes. Be warm and responsive as you work out what they need. They grow quickly so be flexible and change your routines as their needs change.

Enjoy spending time with baby when they are awake - they love your company.

Talking and listening

- Look into baby's eyes, smile and talk to them gently from birth. They will notice the tone of your voice.
- Tell baby what you are doing – name things they are looking at.
- Say what will happen next – that you're going to change their nappy, feed them or put them to bed. They learn what to expect and you are helping them feel safe and secure.
- Use the same words every time, e.g. 'I'm going to pick you up now' or 'Here we go'. Don't just pick them up without warning.

- Listen to baby's little noises and copy them back – it's the start of learning to talk.

Talking to baby helps them learn that sounds make words and they will gradually learn that words have meaning.

Sharing books

- It is never too early to start sharing a book with baby for a few minutes each day.
- Looking at bright pictures and hearing your words can be a special time for closeness, safety, seeing, hearing and learning about sounds and what they mean.
- Babies learn that books, reading and stories are enjoyable.

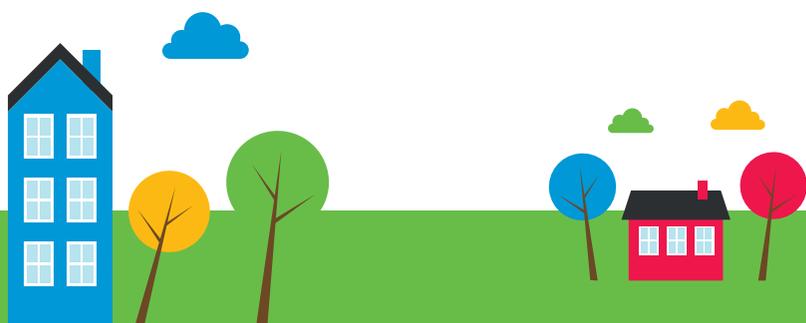
Playing

Playing is how babies learn. Give them lots of chances to be curious and explore. They might enjoy:

- a variety of different things to look at and touch
- a walk outside to look at leaves or grasses moving
- things they can hit or push that make a noise
- mimicking games - baby pokes their tongue out and you do it back. Leave plenty of time for baby to take their turn
- simple songs and rhymes while you rock or gently jiggle baby on your knee.

It is important for baby to have some tummy time on the floor each day from birth. It helps them develop muscles for crawling and head control. Never leave them alone on their tummy.

Don't play rough games such as throwing baby up in the air, lifting or pulling them by an arm. These actions can harm babies.



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Be sensitive to your baby – don't overwhelm them. If they yawn or look away they may be saying they need a rest. Too much activity when they don't want it is as unhelpful as too little activity.
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Sleep

Managing sleep is one of the common concerns for parents. It can help to know that:

- each baby's sleep is different even in the same family and their sleep needs change quickly
- babies in the first weeks sleep much of the day and night. Most wake every two or three hours around the clock needing a feed and attention. Many sleep 14-20 hours a day
- by three months many babies are awake longer during the day and may sleep longer at night. Most babies of this age still need one or two night feeds. When a baby sleeps about five hours straight this is considered 'sleeping through the night'.

What parents can do to help babies settle

A relaxing bedtime routine can help babies settle to sleep - a bath, feed, song, story, goodnight kiss and special soft words. Baby can begin to learn it is time for bed.

- Notice baby's 'tired' signals – they might yawn, cry, rub their eyes or have random jerky movements. It is time to put them to bed.
- A tired newborn can often be put in their cot while awake and fall asleep on their own.
- Some settle best in a quiet, dark place - others prefer noisier lighter places.

Wrapping

Some babies settle better if wrapped in a light cotton cloth - others do not. Make sure the wrapping is firm, but not too tight so babies can still bend their knees. Make sure they are not too hot. When babies can roll it is time to cease wrapping them as there is a chance they could roll on to their face and suffocate.

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Sleep safety

- Always sleep baby on their back – never their tummy or side. This helps prevent Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).
- Sleep baby in a cot next to your bed for the first six to twelve months. Do not have them sleep with you as they may be rolled on or get tangled in bedding and suffocate.
- Use a cot that meets Australian standards. Do not use doonas, pillows, bumpers or put soft toys or other objects in the cot. Keep the cot away from curtain or blind cords and keep pets away.
- Do not expose babies to tobacco smoke.

Baby safety

- Use a rear-facing baby capsule in the car and make sure you have the correct restraint as they grow. It is against the law to smoke in a car with children under 16 years.
- Never leave baby alone on change tables or other surfaces - they can easily fall.
- Protect baby from pets – put up barriers if you need to. Never leave them alone together.
- Protect baby from being frightened. Don't shout, play loud music near them or make sudden loud noises.





- Never leave baby alone in the bath - they can drown in only a few centimetres of water. Keep them away from pools, ponds, dams, troughs and buckets of water such as those left out for pets.
- Check your house for safety. Keep babies away from power points, curtain cords, things that could fall on them and poisons such as cigarettes, medicines, cleaning products.
- Never shake a baby. This can cause brain damage and some children die. If you feel upset or angry, take a short break until you calm down. Make sure baby is safe first.

Your feelings matter

When you are a parent it is normal to have lots of different feelings or to feel overwhelmed at times. It can help to:

- talk to other parents, family, friends, your doctor or child health nurse
- find out about babies so you know what to expect
- take time to enjoy special moments with baby
- make time to spend with your partner or do other special things you enjoy
- notice and feel proud of what you achieve each day - even small things.

If you feel upset or low much of the time talk with your doctor, nurse or contact services such as Beyond Blue or PANDA.

Getting support

All parents need help at times. Don't be afraid to ask trusted family or friends to lend a hand. Even washing the dishes can help.

Take baby to the Lismore (6620 2967) or Goonellabah (6625 0111) Child and Family Health Service. The nurses can answer your questions and support you with your parenting. Remember to take your 'Blue Book' (My Personal Health Record) with you.

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This is a good time to join a parent group or baby play group – sharing ideas with others can be a great help. Baby will love it too!
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Want more information?

Parentline NSW

Phone 1300 1300 52

For advice on child health and parenting
www.parentline.org.au

Healthdirect

Phone 1800 022 222

24 hours To speak to a registered nurse
www.healthdirect.gov.au

Families NSW

Various resources to help parents at any stage in life.

www.families.nsw.gov.au

Raising Children

The Australian Parenting Website

<http://raisingchildren.net.au/>

Beyond Blue

Phone 1300 22 4636

Phone and online support if you are feeling low
www.beyondblue.org.au

PANDA (Post and Antenatal Depression Association)

Phone 1300 726 306

For information, support and counselling for new parents, family and friends
www.panda.org.au

SIDS and Kids

Phone 1800 308 307, 24hours

For information about safe infant sleeping and bereavement support
www.rednose.com.au

Local Services

Goonellabah Child & Family Health Service

Phone 02 6625 0111

9am – 4:30pm, Monday to Friday to make an appointment.

Lismore Community Health - Child and Family

Phone: 02 6620 7687

8am – 5:00pm, Monday to Friday to make an appointment.

Family Support Network

Family Workers can offer you practical and emotional support to enhance & strengthen your parenting & family relationships.

Phone: 02 6621 2489

www.fsn.org.au

Midwives Antenatal Clinic - Lismore Base Hospital

Support during pregnancy and following birth

Phone: 02 6620 2967

Brighter Futures

Support services for improving emotional, social, health and education development outcomes for families and their children.

Phone: 02 6682 4334