
BACK TO BASICS

Child guidance: Infants

Babies are born with unique temperaments. While one baby may be active and curious, another is shy and fearful, and still another is hesitant but adaptable. But in spite of these differences, all infants face a critical social-emotional task between birth and 12 months of age. They must develop **trust** in significant caregivers, the environment, and their own emerging skills. This means that adults must respond promptly to a baby's needs—physical, emotional, social, and cognitive—by interpreting those needs and providing the tools necessary for building basic trust.

Provide individualized care

Babies learn best when they are in a state of quiet alertness. The more time they spend in this state, the more they can learn because they don't have to work hard to get their basic needs met.

- **Encourage attachment.** Respond quickly and sensitively to a baby's signals, cries as well as coos. As you get better at responding, the baby gets better

at giving cues. As you get to know each baby as a unique individual, you and the baby grow attached to each other. Strive to build this attachment in everything you do with the baby—feeding, diapering, clothing, hand washing, and playing.

OFFER HUGS AND SNUGGLES
DURING ALL ROUTINES.

- **Learn the baby's cries.** Babies can have a dozen different cries, each indicating a different need. The baby depends on you to differentiate and respond to the unique cries of hunger, wet, cold, hurt, frustration, and even boredom. By learning what a particular cry means, you can better satisfy the baby's need and build a sense of security.
- **Make lots of physical contact.** Hold the baby while bottle-feeding, not only for safety but also to strengthen emotional bonds. Rock babies to sleep or lay them down and stroke their backs. Hold the baby while reading a story, sharing a toy, or having a conversation. Offer hugs and snuggles during all routines.
- **Anticipate needs.** Predict, or anticipate, a baby's need for food, water, sleep, diapering, or play, so that you can quickly satisfy that need. Use the baby's temperament, developmental skills, and activity level to help you make accurate, and satisfying, predictions. For example, because Angie has had an unusually active morning climbing over floor pillows, you may need to plan to feed her and put her down for nap a bit earlier than usual.

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▪ **Baby-proof the environment.** As babies learn to crawl, their ever-growing world demands exploration. But the ability to explore doesn't imply a parallel ability to discern danger. Make sure the play area is safe and engaging. A safe environment allows and encourages babies to explore freely without hearing you repeat, "No."

▪ **Use developmentally appropriate guidance.** A baby's short attention span enables you to effectively **distract**, **substitute**, and **redirect**. Each of these techniques offers new emotional and cognitive opportunities without harsh or negative behavioral consequences. For example, make use of these guidance techniques in the following circumstances.

Distraction: Ignacio continues to cry after his mother leaves, in spite of your best efforts to reassure and comfort him. Use distraction—with a puppet, song, or toy—to help him find comfort and security in your care.

Substitution: When Emily and Hannah struggle over a single truck, offer one child another truck or a different toy as a substitute.

Redirection: When Ethan crawls over to investigate the cover on the electrical outlet, carry him to the rug and introduce a new stacking toy. ■