

Your Baby's Emotional Health

Tips for Parents and Caregivers

Babies' brains continue to grow and develop after they are born. The first five years are a very important time for development of the brain and emotional health. What happens during this time shapes the way your child learns, thinks and behaves for the rest of their life. As a parent or caregiver, there are many ways you can nurture your child's brain and emotional health development.

Be warm, loving, and responsive

- How you bond with your baby in these early years will affect the way their brain works and grows. A secure bond with your child will help them handle the stress of daily life, not just today but in the future.
- Your baby learns to trust the world by how you respond. React to your child's needs with warmth and care.

Respond to your child's cues

- Cues are the sounds and faces that babies make and the ways they move. Cues, such as crying, are how your baby speaks to you. They give clues to what they need.
- By learning and reading your baby's cues, you will help your baby form secure bonds with you and others.
- When your child smiles, smile back; when they cry, offer comfort; when they are hungry, feed them.

Talk, sing, and read to your child

- Tell stories about daily events.
- Read to your child everyday.



- Sing songs about the people and places your child knows.
- Describe what is going on during daily routines: "See how Daddy brushes his teeth."

Create routines and rituals

- Daily routines and rituals help children feel secure. They help children know what to expect and to get ready for the next part of their day.
- Have a routine for naps and bedtime. Try singing a song and closing the curtains at naptime. Before bed, hug all family members and read a story to your child.
- Research shows children with daily routines do better in school.

Create a safe place for your child to explore and play

- Babies explore to learn about the world around them. Children learn through playing.
- Remove harmful objects and make safe areas that your baby can explore.
- Be there when your child needs to ask you questions or just wants to feel secure.

Avoid screen time early on, then choose media with care

- The American Academy of Pediatrics advises that children under 18 months not have any screen time other than video chatting.
- Media can't teach a baby how to talk. They learn by hearing your words and making eye contact with you, especially while playing and reading.
- If you choose to use media with your 18- to 24-month-old, pick high-quality apps and use them with your child.
- Limit screen time to 1 hour per day of high-quality media for children ages 2 to 5.
- Choose programs and apps with your child and watch with them. Talk about what you watch.
- Don't use media as a babysitter, or to calm or soothe your child.

Use discipline to teach and guide

- As children explore their world, they need you to set limits.
- Discipline is teaching, not punishing.
- Offer consistent and loving adult guidance.
- Never hit or shake a child. The only thing a child learns from spanking is fear, disgrace and rage.

- Distract and redirect a child when they are doing something you don't like.
- Instead of telling your child just what they can't do, tell your child what they can do. "It's not OK to jump on the bed, you can jump on the floor or outside instead."
- Notice and tell your child when they are doing something right.

Know that each child is unique

- Children grow at different rates.
- Parents who learn and respond to a child's cues and clues will raise children with good self-esteem.
- Your attitude toward your child will affect how your child feels about themselves.
- Give concrete praise. Say, "I like how you put your shoes away" instead of "good job." This helps a child to see the links between their actions and your response.

Choose quality childcare and stay involved

- Visit different childcare providers. Observe how staff responds to and cares for the babies and children.
- Choose someone who is eager to learn about your child, will give one-on-one time, will play with your child and let them explore.
- Seek a provider who responds promptly and with warmth to your baby or child's needs.
- Watch your child for cues about the care being given.
- Find a setting that is clean and safe.
- Check references.

Take care of yourself

- Parents and caregivers need care too.
- When you are tired, busy with other tasks, or depressed, it is harder to meet the needs of young children.
- Plan and take regular breaks for yourself during the day and week. Even short breaks help.
- When you feel overwhelmed, take care of yourself. Reach out and get some help.
- Swap childcare with a friend. Ask family members, friends, childcare and health care providers and others to help you foster your child's healthy development.

To Learn More

- seattlechildrens.org
- Your child's healthcare provider

Seattle Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Call Marketing Communications at 206-987-5323.

This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Seattle Children's. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's healthcare provider.

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