

About babies



Having a baby changes your life. There is a new little person to get to know, love and care for. New parents can have a range of 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 new world they know nothing about.

They need to learn that the world is safe and there are people who will look after them. They learn this when you are warm, loving, kind and gentle, and provide the comfort, cuddles and food they need. 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 babies are not responded to warmly or are not touched, noticed or talked to, the stress and unhappiness they feel causes connections that react to stress to be strengthened. They may not grow, learn or develop as well.

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 and learn best when they feel loved, safe and secure.

When babies feel loved they learn to love you too.

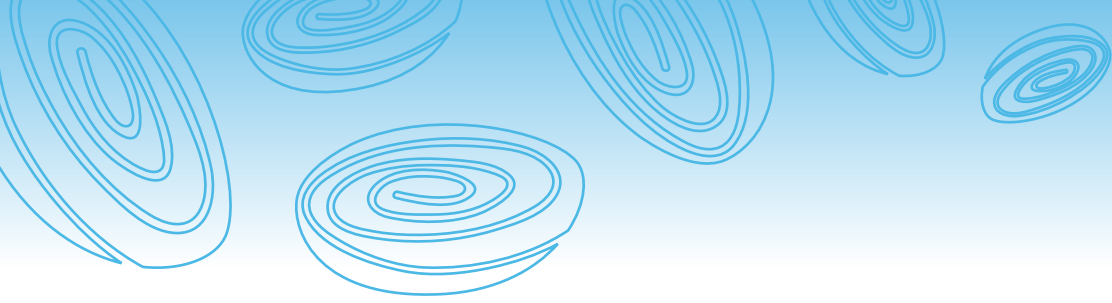
Baby's relationships

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'.

Attachment develops when you respond to baby warmly, smile and talk to them and provide what they need.

- Loving early relationships help babies learn how to respond and what to expect in future relationships. They provide the building blocks for learning and developing self-confidence, emotional control and the skills to get along with others. This is why these early relationships are so important.
- Babies can learn to know other people who respond to them warmly and kindly, and make them feel safe, eg grandparents or other carers.

Babies who have loving early relationships are better able to grow and learn and 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 or little noises, smile, copy your gestures, look relaxed and interested.
- When they need a break they may look away, shut their eyes, struggle, pull away, yawn, look tense, 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 and is the start of two-way communication and learning to talk.

Why babies cry

Crying is the main way babies communicate their needs. They might:

- need a feed or nappy change
- need a cuddle or closeness with you
- be frightened, bored or lonely
- be too hot or cold
- be unwell or in pain, eg tummy ache or earache.

Responding to babies

It is important to respond promptly and warmly when your baby is upset. This helps them:

- learn to feel safe and secure and to trust you
- relax and learn the world is a safe place
- settle better and cry less in the long run. When you soothe babies they get better at soothing themselves.

You cannot 'spoil' a baby by going to them when they cry. They need your loving attention to help them feel safe and secure.

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

- holding them close – try upright against your shoulder
- using a gentle, reassuring voice, eg 'sh', 'sh', 'sh'
- rocking them in your arms
- taking them for a walk in a pram
- soothing sounds such as soft music or ticking clock
- offering a dummy – it's best to wait until breastfeeding is well-established.

If you have any concerns, you could phone the Parent Helpline on 1300 364 100, or see your doctor or the Child and Family Health Service - phone 1300 733 606 for an appointment.

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

What babies can do

Right from the start most babies can:

- suck to feed
- feel, see, hear, taste and smell
- move their arms and legs, but not 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, especially things that are close.

- They can see your face and will soon recognise you.
- Things that are further away will be blurry as distance vision takes time to develop.

In the first few weeks a baby's eyes often cross or wander in different directions. By 3 months their eyes should 'line 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 may recognise their mother's or other people's voices.
- 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 food when starting solids. They learn to like the tastes they are given.

Reflexes

Most of a newborn's movements are random and they are not able to control them at first. They have a number of reflexes including:

- 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 – baby pushes things out of their mouth with their tongue, eg 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 your baby develops.

Babies are sensitive to touch and can feel pain. Gentle caring touch and being held when they are distressed tells babies they are loved and cared for and not alone.

Development in the first year

All babies are different but 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:

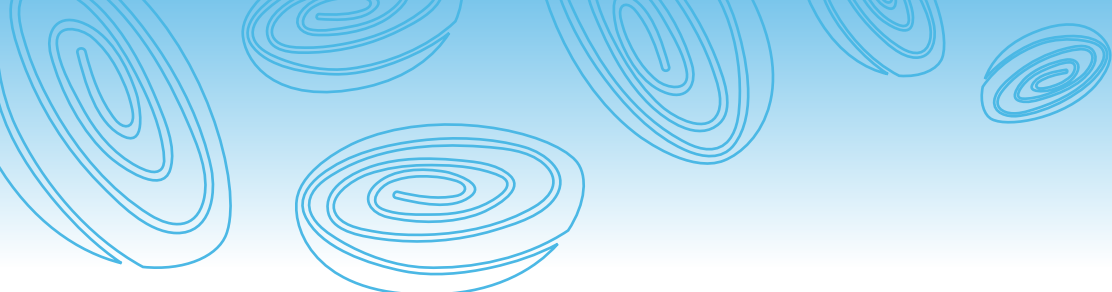
- know familiar people and be wary of strangers
- delight in playing 'peek-a-boo' games
- sit for a few minutes without using their hands for support

by 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.

For more on development see your 'Blue Book' (My health and development record) which is given to South Australian parents when babies are born, www.cyh.com or the Parent Easy Guide 'Milestones: children 0-4'.





Separation anxiety

From about 6 months, babies can remember you when you are not there. They may cry when they can't see you. This is called separation anxiety. It is a normal part of learning they are a separate person. Sleep patterns may change and some babies wake at night or are 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 waving goodbye when you leave and letting them know when you are back
- playing games such as 'peek-a-boo' to help them get used to you coming and going
- only leaving them with people they know well and feel safe with.

Each baby is different, even in the same family. Your baby may 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 to your doctor or child health nurse to make sure all is well, or to get any help your child needs.

What parents can do to help babies develop

When you spend time with baby, looking into their eyes, talking, playing and giving them things to look at and touch, you are helping them learn and develop.

It is important to think of your baby as a unique individual with their own likes and dislikes, and to be warm and responsive. You will soon discover what your baby enjoys. Giving them lots of chances to be curious and explore provides the building blocks for learning and making the most of the school years.

Enjoy spending time with baby when they are awake - they love your company. Playing is how they learn.

- **Talk with baby gently from birth.** They will notice the tone of your voice.
 - They won't understand your words at first. That's OK. Hearing the sounds and words helps language development. They gradually learn that sounds make words and words have meaning.
 - 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, such as '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 – this is the start of learning to talk.
- **Sing songs or say rhymes.** You could gently rock your baby or jiggle them on your knee.
- **Play little mimicking games.** When baby pokes out their tongue, you could do it back. Leave plenty of time for baby to take their turn.



- **Give baby a variety of things to look at and touch.** Give them things they can hold or shake, hit or push to make a noise.
- **Take them for a walk outside.** They will enjoy looking at things such as leaves or grass moving in the breeze.
- **Share books with baby from birth for a few minutes each day.** It is never too soon. Looking at bright pictures and hearing your voice can be a special time of closeness with you and feeling safe. Baby gradually learns sounds and words and what they mean. They learn that books, reading and stories are enjoyable.
- **Give baby 'tummy time'.** It is important for babies to have a few minutes on their tummy each day. This helps them develop muscles for head control and crawling. Never leave them alone on their tummy.

Watch for signals that your baby has had enough – don't overwhelm them. Too much activity when they don't want it is as unhelpful as too little activity. 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.

Sleep

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

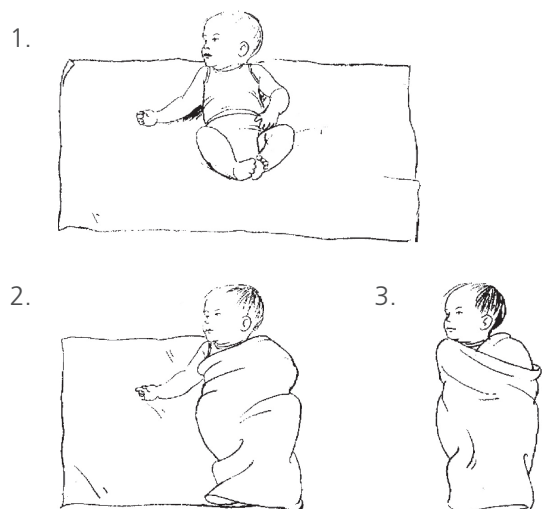
- each baby's sleep is different even in the same family, and sleep needs change quickly
- in the first weeks babies sleep much of the day and night. Most wake every 2 or 3 hours needing a feed and attention. They can sleep 12 to 19 hours a day
- by 3 months many babies are awake longer during the day and sleep longer at night. Most still need 1 or 2 night feeds
- when a baby sleeps about 5 hours straight, this is considered 'sleeping through the night'.

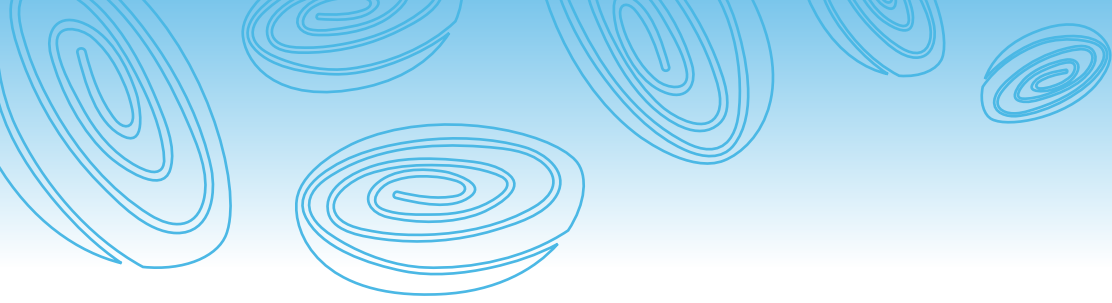
Settling babies

- It is best to notice that your baby is becoming tired and settle them to sleep before they become too tired or stressed. Some early 'tired signs' can be looking away or clenching fists. Later signs can be crying, jerky movements, frowning and looking worried.
- A tired baby can be put into their cot while drowsy but awake. They can fall asleep on their own but most will need help, eg rocking, patting, singing or whatever comforts them. Some settle best in a quiet, dark place - others prefer noisier, lighter places.
- A relaxing bedtime routine can calm babies and help them sleep, eg a bath, feed, song, story, goodnight kiss and special soft words. Babies begin to learn these things mean sleep.

Wrapping

- Some babies settle better if wrapped in a light cotton cloth - others do not.
- Make sure the wrapping is firm, but not so tight that it restricts breathing or leg movement.
- It is important for hip development that baby's legs can bend up and out to the sides, and their legs are not wrapped in the straight position.
- Make sure they are not too hot.
- When babies start showing signs they can roll, usually around 4-6 months but sometimes younger, it is time to cease wrapping as there is a chance they could roll on to their face and suffocate.





Safe sleeping

Some ways to reduce the risk of fatal sleep accidents and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) are to:

- **Sleep baby on their back from birth**, never on their tummy or side
- **Keep baby's head and face uncovered** - no beanie, hat or hood
- **Keep baby smoke free**, before and after birth
- **Provide a safe sleeping place night and day:**
 - use a cot (or portable cot) that meets Australian standards. Make sure the mattress is firm, clean, flat and fits the cot well
 - keep the cot away from curtain or blind cords and other hazards
 - do not use pillows, quilts, doonas or cot bumpers. Do not put soft toys and other soft items in the cot as these are a suffocation risk
 - do not sleep baby on soft surfaces such as sofas, bean bags, pillows or lambswools
 - do not sleep baby in products that are not flat or not designed for sleep, eg car seats, capsules, bouncers, rockers. If baby falls asleep in one of these, move them to a safe sleeping place as soon as possible
 - sleep babies with their feet almost touching the end of the cot. Tuck bedclothes in securely so they just come up to baby's shoulders and their head cannot go under
 - do not use a pillow under 2 years of age
 - avoid clothing that has long strings, ribbons or cords as these are a strangulation or choking risk
 - if using a baby sleeping bag, make sure it is the correct size, with fitted neck, arm holes and no hood. It should provide warmth without overheating baby. Dress baby lightly underneath

- **Sleep baby in their own cot or bassinet next to your bed for the first 6 to 12 months.** Do not sleep them with you as they may be rolled on or get tangled in bedding and suffocate. If you are feeding, cuddling or playing with baby in your bed, it is very important to place them into their cot before you go to sleep. This is particularly important if you are very tired, a heavy sleeper, obese, taking medicines that make you sleep more deeply, or drinking alcohol
- **Breastfeed baby if you can.**

Keeping baby safe

- **Cars:** Put baby in a rear-facing baby capsule and the correct restraints as they grow. Never leave a baby alone in a car. It is against the law to smoke in a car with children under 16 years.
- **Driveways:** Children can be hit by vehicles in driveways. Make sure they are safe before moving your car.
- **Falls:** Never leave baby alone on change tables or other surfaces - they can easily fall.
- **Drowning:** Children can easily drown in small amounts of water. Never leave baby alone in the bath. Keep them away from pools, ponds, dams, troughs and buckets of water such as those left out for pets.
- **Pets:** Never leave babies and pets alone together. Put up barriers if you need to.
- **Home:** Check your house and yard for safety. Keep babies away from power points, curtain cords, things that could fall on them and poisons such as medicines, cigarettes, cleaning or garden products.
- **Noise:** Protect baby from being frightened. Don't yell, play loud music near them or make sudden, loud noises.

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Never shake a baby. This can cause brain damage and some children die. If you feel upset or angry, take a break until you calm down. Make sure baby is safe first.
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Your feelings matter

When you are a mum or dad 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, child health nurse or other health professional
- 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 one of the services listed in this Guide.

Getting support

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

You are welcome to take baby to the Child and Family Health Service. This is free. The nurses can answer your questions and support you with your parenting. It can be useful to take your 'Blue Book' (My health and development record) with you if you can. Phone 1300 733 606 for an appointment.

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

Parent Helpline

Phone 1300 364 100

For advice on baby care, health and development. Phone anytime for advice and support

Child and Family Health Service (CaFHS)

Phone 1300 733 606, 9am-4.30pm, Mon-Fri for an appointment. The child health nurses can help with baby and child health and development, and many aspects of caring for babies. See www.cyh.com for more about babies

What Were We Thinking

Information about common experiences for mothers and fathers in the early months of parenthood and some effective ways of thinking about and managing them www.whatwerewethinking.org.au

MumSpace

Supports the emotional health of new mums at every step www.mumspace.com.au

Mensline Australia

Phone 1300 789 978

Information and support for dads, including first-time dads <https://mensline.org.au>

MumMoodBooster

An online resource helping women recover from postnatal depression <https://mummoodbooster.com/public>

Beyond Blue

Phone 1300 22 4636

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

PANDA (Perinatal Anxiety and Depression Australia)

Phone 1300 726 306

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

Red Nose

Phone 1300 998 698

Information on safe infant sleeping. Phone Crisis Line 1300 799 656
Phone 1300 308 307, 24 hours for bereavement support <https://rednose.com.au>

SIDS and Kids SA

Phone 8332 1066

415 Magill Road, St Morris

Information on safe sleeping including education sessions for parents, grandparents and professionals. Also offers bereavement support www.sidssa.org

Kidsafe SA

Phone 8161 6318, 9.30am-4pm, Mon-Fri for information about child safety. Located opposite the Play Deck, Level 1, Zone A, Women's and Children's Hospital, Adelaide www.kidsafesa.com.au

Raising Children Network

For information on raising children and baby development www.raisingchildren.net.au

Parenting SA

For more Parent Easy Guides including 'Being a parent', 'Being a Mum', 'Being a Dad', 'Single parenting', 'Sleep: children 0-6 years' and 'Milestones: children 0-4 years' www.parenting.sa.gov.au



**Government
of South Australia**

Parenting SA

A partnership between the Department of
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Children's Health Network.

Ph: 08 8303 1660
www.parenting-sa.gov.au

Parent Easy Guides are free in South Australia.

Important: This information is not intended
to replace advice from a qualified practitioner.

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