



Living with babies

Having a baby can be the beginning of an exciting journey. Be prepared for the strong emotions you may feel and the changes that a new baby may bring.

Babies learn more and grow faster than they will at any other time in life. Being prepared will help you make the most of your baby: find out about how babies grow and learn so that you know what to expect.

Your baby's needs

Babies need to be kept clean, comfortable, warm and fed. They need to sleep when they are tired and have someone to play with and cuddle them when they are awake. Learn the signs that show what they need and respond to them.

Your baby will learn from you from the day they are born. It is never too early to start talking to your baby. Hearing lots of words helps their intellectual development later on.

Baby will also learn to feel good about themselves based on how you respond to them. If you think they are fun and enjoyable, show it.

- Think about, treat, and talk to babies as individuals with their own likes and dislikes.
- Avoid startling babies.
- Be flexible. Don't stick to a set routine if it doesn't suit. Baby's routines will change along with their changing needs.

Connecting with your baby

Parents who provide love, attention and interesting experiences create the best conditions for their baby's brain growth, learning and development.

Two to six months

Your baby is watching how you react to them and is learning about emotions. They begin to learn that certain actions such as smiling, cooing, crying or suddenly yelling can bring about emotional responses from you.

- When baby makes noises, show you are listening by smiling, nodding, widening your eyes, and touching them.
- Say things like, "What did you say?" or "Aren't you talking well!" to encourage your baby to keep communicating.
- Help baby to calm down after any emotional excitement. Stroke them and say gentle words or play soothing music. This helps baby to develop emotional control.

Six to nine months

By nine months, your baby's brain has undergone a growth spurt that helps form connections between what baby sees, hears, tastes and feels. Babies at this age can sit by themselves for short times and might start crawling. Your baby might begin to get attached to people and objects, which also brings separation anxiety. Your baby needs to learn that when things disappear, they also reappear.

You can help baby by:

- playing fun games, such as peekaboo
- giving lots of verbal reminders of where you are as you move around a room
- encouraging time with other carers.

Nine to 12 months

Baby will become increasingly vocal. Your baby's ability to experience different emotions and moods has also developed considerably. Your baby will start to move around more and may want more independence, including getting away from things that upset or annoy them.

- When baby begins to make sounds – 'ba ba ba', 'da da da' – repeat them back.
- Repetition in speech – 'Are you hungry?' 'You're hungry aren't you?', 'Ohhh, I'm hungry' – teaches babies the meaning of words and develops speech and language.
- Responding to emotional expressions – 'Yes, I know you're cranky, I'll be back soon' – helps baby to identify emotions and understand the process of feeling better and worse.

Signals

Babies have their own ways of showing what they need. Responding to babies' signals is the beginning of learning two-way communication and independence.

- To show they need attention, babies make eye contact, make noises, smile, copy gestures or look relaxed and interested.
- To show they need a break, or a different or gentler approach, babies may look away, shut their eyes, try to struggle or pull away, yawn, cry and look tense and unsettled.

Crying

Crying is the only way small babies know how to get their needs met.

Babies under six months cry because they need something, but they don't know what they need.

Here are some reasons they cry and ways you can try to help:

- They are hungry or thirsty – try feeding them.
- They are too hot or too cold – adjust their clothing or bed covers.
- They need a nappy change – clean them.
- They are frightened or lonely and need comfort – pick them up and hold them close.
- They are tired – put baby down to sleep in a quiet, darkened room, or give baby a relaxing bath or massage.
- They are unwell – take their temperature (an average temperature is 37°C). Seek medical help if it is high.
- They have pain – hold them against your shoulder, they may need to burp.
- They are anxious – sometimes when they wake at night and you are not there, they miss you. Try putting their cot in your room or spend time quietly in their room.

Find out what soothes your baby, such as a dummy or sounds, such as music or a clock ticking.



Sleeping

Every baby is different. Some need more sleep than others. Some sleep better where it is very quiet; others settle best with ordinary household sounds. Some prefer being wrapped, while others like their arms loose.

Most babies wake during the night as part of their normal sleep cycle. Most babies will need two to three sleeps a day of up to two hours each. From seven to 12 months old, they will normally sleep from between 6pm and 10pm until 5am or later.

A routine will help your baby learn when it is bedtime and settle, for example:

1. Dinner and a bath.
2. Short play time.
3. The last feed of the day.
4. Nappy change.
5. Quiet story time together in the bedroom.
6. Sing a soft song as you put them in the cot.
7. Kiss and say goodnight and turn off the lights or turn on a night-light.



Help your baby learn to go to sleep independently by putting them to bed sleepy but still awake. If they learn to go to sleep without you, they are more likely to drop off again after waking during the night.

Safe sleep

Minimise the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) and fatal sleep accidents by:

- having your baby in a cot in your room for the first 6–12 months
- placing your baby on their back to sleep and leaving their head uncovered making the bed so baby's feet reach the bottom of the cot to prevent their head from sliding under the covers.
- using a firm and well-fitting mattress and removing bumpers, soft toys and doonas from the cot
- using only light bedding to avoid overheating
- avoiding using pillows because they are not necessary for babies
- checking that pets cannot get into baby's room
- placing the cot away from things they might play with and get tangled in, such as heaters, power points, lights, hanging mobiles and curtain cords.

Bathing

Babies do not need a bath every day. Wash their face and bottom when you need to. Babies usually most enjoy a bath when they are calm after being fed.

If they are unsettled, a bath may help make them feel better and help them go to sleep.

- Bathing them more than once a day will dry their skin.
- Keep soap, shampoos and bubble baths to a minimum because they can irritate skin and cause nappy rash.
- Stay with your baby at all times when they are in the bath. Children can drown even in very shallow water in only a few seconds.
- The recommended bath temperature for babies is about 36°C.

Teeth and teething

Most teeth appear when babies are between six and ten months old and can be painful. Giving babies something firm to bite, such as a cold teething ring or rusk, or teething gel can sooth their pain.

- Some babies prefer mushy food when teething, but others prefer chewy food.
- You can start cleaning and caring for your baby's gums well before the first tooth appears by wiping their gums gently using a clean, damp cloth.
- As soon as teeth arrive, clean them twice a day (in the morning and before bed) using a clean, soft cloth.
- Don't use toothpaste for babies under 18 months of age.



Play

Babies enjoy games from a young age; games help them to learn about the world. Try playing with your child by:

- making noises together such as gently banging pots or making animal sound, for example, ‘the cow goes “moooooo”’
- giving them a safe place to explore and work on new skills, such as, sitting up, crawling, pulling up, opening cupboards, and picking up things and throwing them
- giving them toys or odds and ends such as empty egg cartons to help develop their imagination
- ensuring they get physical activity, such as, tummy time for little babies, and time at the playground as they get older.

Avoid rough games such as throwing them in the air, pulling them by the arm or playing loud music. These actions can hurt. It is important not to shake a baby because it can cause brain damage.

Television isn’t recommended for children under two. If you want to put the TV on, limit it to ten minutes a day of baby-friendly programs such as *Play School*.

Your feelings

Most new parents are happy with their new role but can also have some less happy feelings. For example, it can be upsetting to have your baby cry and not be able to stop them. Sometimes it is so upsetting that you feel like hurting them or leaving. If this happens, make sure they are safe and then leave the room until you feel better. You may find taking the baby out for fresh air helps. Know yourself — do whatever helps you feel less stressed.

If you find you are feeling down and irritable most of the time, talk to your doctor or a person you trust.

Ask for information or advice and accept help. Many parents at some stage find parenting difficult, especially if you are parenting on your own.

More information

The Queensland Government provides families with up-to-date information about approved early childhood education and care services in their local area, and has parent tip sheets on a range of topics.

To access the latest information or to find an early childhood education and care service call 13 QGOV* (13 74 68) or visit www.earlychildhood.qld.gov.au.

For service ratings visit the MyChild website at www.mychild.gov.au or the Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) website at www.acecqa.gov.au.

Other languages

If you need an interpreter, phone 13 QGOV (13 74 68).

Assistance making a call

If you are deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment:

- TTY users phone 133 677*, then ask for 13 74 68*.
- Speak-and-listen users should phone 1300 555 727*, then ask for 13 74 68*
- Internet relay users should connect to the National Relay Service at www.iprelay.com.au/call/index.aspx then ask for 13 74 68*.

Acknowledgement

The information in this publication was sourced from the Raising Children Network at www.raisingchildren.net.au

Disclaimer

This publication is offered as a guide and should not be considered an exhaustive statement on the subject.

**Calls from mobile phones are charged at applicable rates.*