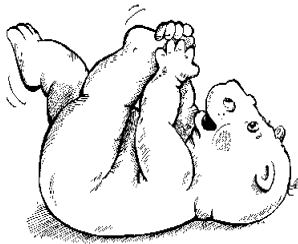


Play and Your Baby From Birth to Six Months

Play is the ‘work’ of your baby. It’s how babies learn about their world and how they learn the skills they need to develop. A playful baby is hard at work!



First Playmate

As a parent, you are your baby’s first playmate - the one who provides a safe place to explore, and who offers fun and interest. Babies come with built-in playthings - toes, fingers, hands, legs and feet. Babies are very social beings and they will love playing with you most of all.

These early months of play are wonderful times to get to know your baby and build a loving relationship together. Watch what your baby likes best and when your baby likes to play. For example, some babies wake up ready to rock n’ roll while others wake up grumpy and need to be cuddled and fed before they want to play.

Babies Grow

The first six months of babies’ lives are fascinating! They grow very fast and master new skills every day. First they find their fingers, then their toes. They start to reach for things and one day they close their fingers over it and realize that they can get what they want by themselves! They hold up their head, look around and their world grows bigger. They rock from side to side, and one day, they roll over. Then they roll over again and again and they suddenly get it... they can move their whole body wherever they want! Keep ahead of your baby, to keep them from grabbing dangerous things or falling down steps.

Emotionally and intellectually, babies learn very quickly that when they cry, someone comes. And when they smile, people smile back. When they gurgle and coo and make happy noises, people get excited and make sounds back. Encourage your baby to make sounds, and try to figure out what your baby is trying to ‘say’.

Home is the Playground

Keep it safe, clean and interesting. Babies are on the floor and put everything into their mouths. This is their way of exploring. It is up to you to keep small and sharp things out of reach so your baby doesn’t choke on them, poke her eye, or cut herself. Your baby is learning, growing and developing fast. Keep her world safe by keeping dangerous things out of reach. To make baby’s world safe, assume she will grab her first toy today, or roll over for the first time today.

Realize that your baby is growing all the time, both physically and mentally. Her environment constantly needs to grow and change. Give her new toys (trade a blue ball for the red ball!) and make sure she can’t put the whole toy into her mouth.

Babies Love to Touch

Babies learn through touch. Help them explore their world by giving them lots of different shapes and textures. Talk to them as they feel different things like ‘smooth wood’, ‘rough sandpaper’, ‘soft fur’, a ‘squishy stuffed animal’ and a ‘hard plastic container’.

Let him put different (safe and clean) things in his mouth - a knobby rubber toy, or a cold teething ring. Most babies love water and bath time. As he gets older, add a few simple toys to the bath.

Babies Love to Look

New babies love mobiles made with bright colours and different shapes. Make sure they look interesting from the baby's point of view, which is *below the mobile*. Put colourful pictures up where baby can see them - near her crib, highchair, and beside the change table. Place a mirror where baby can see himself, either made of non-breakable baby-proof materials, or out of reach. Start baby's own personal picture book with colourful pictures that baby will like including animals, other babies, and some photos of the important people in her life, including her! Sit together looking at this book and talk about what you see in the book. Babies love books for the pictures and for the sound of your voice reading. Make cuddling together with a book a regular habit.

Babies love to watch you, so put their baby seat in a safe place (on the ground) where they can watch you make dinner or fix the car! Using simple words and sentences, tell them what you are doing - "I'm fixing the car. It won't work." Talk to them while you work and they'll be happy watching, for a while.

Babies Love Sound

Babies love music. Play the music you like to listen to and baby will probably enjoy it too. Remember to keep the volume reasonable. Sing songs like 'this little pig goes to market' when you change his diaper. Babies love the sound of singing, so sing to them. They also love to babble and coo and gurgle, and hearing you imitate them!

Babies like to make noise, so look for things they can grasp which make noise, like plastic keys or rattles or crib gyms with noisy features.

The first year of life is important to your baby's speech. Talk to your baby, all the time, about everything. Point out the ladybug on the sidewalk, your nose, ears and eyes, and show her something red and something blue. By talking to your baby, you are helping him learn and helping him learn to talk.

Babies Love to Move

Young babies enjoy having their arms and legs gently moved. Holding their hands, slowly move their arms back and forth across their chest. 'Bicycle' his legs and sing silly, nonsense songs that you make up just for the two of you.

Gently push against your baby's feet (and feel her leg muscles push against you!) and lift her legs up and down. Make a kicking bag by stuffing a brightly coloured pillowslip with soft material. Position baby so that his feet will kick the pillow. Holding baby snugly, dance around the room to your favourite music, rock in a rocking chair, or swing in a swing. Almost all babies love to go for walks, either in a stroller, a baby pack, or once they can sit up, in a baby backpack.

This BC HealthFile has presented some ideas to help you with the challenge of parenting. There are other topics in the child development series that you may also find helpful. The BC HealthFiles link and this series can be found on the BC HealthGuide Web site at:

www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/index.stm



For more BC HealthFile topics visit www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/index.stm, or visit your local public health unit.

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