

Understanding your baby

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Introduction

Having a baby is an exciting time for a family but it can also be tiring and confusing. Parents often have lots of questions about how they are caring for their baby and if they are doing things 'right'.

Getting it 'right' will be different for different babies. One important thing in understanding your baby is to learn how your baby lets you know what he needs and how he is feeling. Although your baby cannot speak he will have his own special way of letting you know how best to care for him. From when they are born babies are able to do this but no two babies will do it in the same way.

We hope this booklet will help you to understand your baby so you can enjoy him or her and have fun together.

Babies like to be sociable!

Babies are born with certain behaviours that help them to be sociable and communicate with you. Take time to watch your baby and look at what she does. You will soon learn what she wants and needs though this will take longer with some babies than with others.



Seeing

Babies can see from birth but in the early weeks focus more easily on things about 8 inches away from their faces. They love to watch the human face.



hold your baby about 8 inches away from your face. Talk to her and watch what she does. Hold up a bright toy 8 inches away and move it slowly from side to side. Watch her follow it with her eyes or head.

Hearing and Listening

Babies can hear everything but they like the sound of the human voice best. Talking to your baby, even though they may not understand the words, can help you bond with your baby. Babies benefit from lots of 'quiet time', listening to your voice without background noise (such as TV)



stand next to your baby to one side and talk to her. Watch what she does. Now talk to her from the other side. Try playing with your voice—high/low—fast/slow.

Smiling

Babies smile from birth but in the early weeks this is usually a reflex or automatic behaviour.



watch for your baby's smile and smile back. Show your pleasure and talk to her. When you have eye contact and she smiles you will know she is smiling at you.

Cuddling

Babies like to cuddle though some like it better than others. Some have certain times when they like cuddles best such as when they are sleepy.



if you cuddle your baby often from the start you will find out her favourite cuddle and cuddle time. If your baby stiffens when you cuddle her she probably doesn't want a cuddle at that time.

Moving

Some babies move their arms and legs a lot and some a little. The movements may be smooth, jerky or little tremors. Some babies have trembly chins! A baby may move more at certain times of day, some when they are cuddled and some when they are left alone.



watch your baby and you will learn when she moves the most and what her movements are like.



Your baby will communicate with you mainly using body language. The traffic light system can help you to understand when your baby wants your attention and when he needs a rest.



Your baby wants to interact with you when he:

- Looks at you
- Reaches towards you
- Smiles at you
- Babbles and talks to you
- Has wide and bright eyes



Your baby is likely to need a change from what is happening if he:

- Looks away
- Turns his head away
- Yawns
- Puts his hands up to his face
- Has a dull looking face or eyes

He may need a change of pace if he

- Becomes more active and restless



Your baby is letting you know he is distressed and needs a break when he:

- Turns away
- Cries
- Whines or fusses
- Squirms or kicks
- Arches his back
- Pulls away
- Vomits

Different baby 'states'

During the course of each day your baby will move through different levels of sleepiness and wakefulness that are called 'states'. Learning to read your baby's states will help you to know how best to respond to her at different times.

sleep states

deep sleep



Your baby is in deep sleep when:

- Her breathing is steady and regular
- Her eyes are closed
- She lies still (though she might sometimes startle, jerk or show sucking movements)
- She is hard to rouse

Babies do their growing during deep sleep.

Traffic light system says: **red**

light sleep

Your baby is in light sleep when:

- His eyes are closed or fluttering. There may be rapid eye movements under the lids
- He shows some body or face movements
- He may show sucking or smiling movements or make brief fussy or crying sounds
- He is easy to rouse.

Traffic light system says: **red**

awake states

drowsy/dozing

Your baby is in this sleepy state of wakefulness when:

- Her eyes are open but glazed or heavy lidded or closed with fluttering eyelids
- She shows occasional mild startles
- Her body movements are generally smooth.

This is a pre-waking state. She may fall back to sleep again from this state so wait a little before fully waking her. Offering her something to touch or suck may help you to see if she is waking or settling back to sleep.

Traffic light system says: **amber**



quiet alert

Your baby is ready for action in this state when:

- He is wide eyed, with a bright face
- He is able to focus on and be interested in a face, voice or moving object
- He shows little body movement

This is the time when he is ready to play, feed or just enjoy your company!

This is the best state for your baby to enjoy a massage. Take your time and be prepared to allow time for him to rest a moment and look away from whatever you are doing with him.

Traffic light system says: **green!**



active alert

You will know your baby is in this state when:

- She shows lots of activity often with thrashing movements of her arms and legs
- She may fuss
- She may be more sensitive than other times to noise and/or hunger

Babies in this state need a change of pace. You need to slow down or change what you are doing. In the night it is likely to indicate the need for a feed.

Traffic light system says: **amber**



crying

You will know this state in your baby when:

- He shows lots of body activity
- He grimaces and cries intensely so it is difficult to get through to him

When your baby cries you need to stop what you are doing with him. Try to calm him using a soothing repetitive approach (see over leaf for things to try).

Traffic light system says: **red**

