

# Play, Bonding & Connection

The New  
Parent  
Company

## Introduction

What does play look like for a baby?

In the first few weeks you will have short windows when your baby is awake, alert & active - this is Play Time.

Some key things to remember with very little babies:

- Slow everything down, live in the now and just enjoy a slower pace as this baby phase goes fast
- Babies can become over stimulated very quickly. Signs of tiring are yawning, frowns, grimaces and turning away, and sometimes a hiccup.
- Babies play with all their senses

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### External senses (5)

Sight - hearing - touch - taste - smell

### Internal senses/systems (3)

Proprioception - Vestibular - Interoception



## Oxytocin

The love hormone! One hormone we can't get enough of.

When Oxytocin is released into the blood stream you get a warm, fuzzy and sometimes loved up feeling.

Get your dose of oxytocin through hugging, kissing cuddling, baby massage, any skin to skin or exercise.

### Attachment

All humans especially babies are hardwired for connection and attachment. We need it for survival, without it we would simply fade away.

To create a secure attachment you need to respond to your baby consistently with love, care and understanding.

This bonding will help to form an attachment and will help your child feel safe, secure and protected.

### Stages of attachment

Birth - 6 weeks

This is the start of the attachment journey, where babies are generally happy to be left with unfamiliar adults.

6 weeks - 6 months

The building blocks of relationships begin to form, but generally still happy to be left with unfamiliar adults.

6/8 months - 18 months

We have attachment! Children can become distressed when left with unknown people - known as separation anxiety.

From 18 months onwards independence starts to form.

A newborn baby's optimal vision is between 7-12 inches (approximately your nipple to your eye).

Babies can recognise their parents faces at around 2 weeks.

Babies will turn their entire head to look at objects as they can't move their eyes until 2-4 months.

Before 6 weeks baby's can't focus on far away objects, so their eyes might go out of alignment (cross-eyed)

It takes six weeks to gain binocular vision, and for the muscles of the eye to strengthen and co-ordinate.

Stereoscopic depth perception (perceiving the world in "3D") doesn't happen until approximately 16 weeks postpartum.

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## Eye checks



Within 72 hours of birth your baby's eyes will be checked for any obvious physical problems.

Your baby's eyes may be checked a number of times throughout the first hours, weeks and years of their life.

Between 6 and 8 weeks is a follow-up physical examination.

Then again around 1 year, and if you have any concerns about your child's eyesight between 2 and 2 1/2.

## Best ways to play with a baby to stimulate their vision.

- Eye tracking, move objects slowly across babies line of vision. This will help strengthen the eye & neck muscles as they turn to track the item.
- Walk around slowly giving babies time to focus on objects you see, such as paintings, trees, lights & the mirror.
- Toys or pictures that are Black & White / contrasting colours / bold geometric patterns are best for stimulating babies vision.
- Babies love pulling faces, especially when mimicking their parents (mirror play).
- Play with different soft lights.

Sometimes it might seem your baby is staring at nothing or just staring at the wall, don't worry! It's completely normal, they are very busy developing their minds.





# Sight Milestones

## 1 Month Milestones

- Moves eyes and head toward light sources
- Tracks objects horizontally across midline (especially faces)
- Makes eye contact and focuses on a caregiver



## 3-6 Month Milestones

- Observes toys falling and rolling away
- Shifts fixation across midline (moves gaze from left to right)
- Focuses attention almost across the room
- Likes looking at reflection

## 2-3 Month Milestones

- Tracks an object both vertically and circularly
- Recognises faces
- Begins to move eyes independently from head
- Exhibits increased light sensitivity
- Studies hands or feet
- Becomes easily distracted by interesting sights
- Holds intense eye contact for longer periods of time



## Say that again..

Babies hearing develops around month 5-6 of pregnancy. Research shows that babies actively listen to their mothers voice in the last month of pregnancy.

Babies hearing is fully developed at birth.

## 'Parentese' or 'Motherese'

Most of us instinctively talk to babies in a higher pitch, sing song type voice without even realising that we are doing it. This is called parentese or motherese.

Talking this way helps babies to separate words due to the pitch and speed and the over enunciation in your voice. Throw in some exaggerated face movement to grab babies attention and you might even get a smile back.

It's likely that "parentese" helps babies learn about our emotions. It may also help them decipher language.

To help babies learn language, we need to spend time talking with them one-on-one and in environments that are free from lots of back ground noise.

## Best ways to play with a baby to stimulate their hearing.

- Singing
- listening to music together (any type of music you or they like)
- Talking to baby
- Reading books
- Using toys that make a noise
- Chatting - waiting for baby to coo, respond then waiting again for them to coo, oo, ah back at you
- Dancing together
- Changing the tone & pitch in your voice, be loud, whisper, deep, high, fast slow - have a play!





## Skin is the first organ to develop

A baby's most powerful sense, even when in the womb is touch. Massaging your baby from when they are young has a number of long-term physiological and emotional benefits.

Regular massage can help:

- Build a baby's immune system
- Boost his or her respiratory system
- Stimulate the circulatory system
- Balance the baby's nervous system.

Skin to skin should be given for as long as possible and as frequently as possible during the first 3 months because it:

- Improves quality of sleep
- Accelerates brain development
- Calms & Soothes babies in turn this reduces crying and stress
- Regulates body temperature
- Reduces risk of PND in both parents
- Stimulates Oxytocin



## Best ways to play with a baby to stimulate their touch

- Baby Massage
- Skin to skin contact
- Cuddles
- During bath time let baby play and splash around in the water
- Wrap baby in different textured towels or blankets while holding them
- Foil blankets
- Walking outside to allow the elements touch their skin
- Messy play (once they are old enough to sit up and always supervised)
- Touching skin with different objects/textures such as feathers, wool, velvet





## Why do babies put things in their mouth?

The tongue is where the largest concentration of touch receptors live. It's a way for the baby to understand objects and the world around them.

A baby has around 30,000 taste buds.

They are not just on the tongue but also on the sides, back, and roof of the mouth. Adults have about 10,000.

Babies will explore objects with their mouth until around 2 years old.

A baby cannot taste salt until it is 4 months old. The delay may be related to the development of kidneys, which start to process sodium at about that age.



Newborns love sweet things

## Best ways to play with a baby to stimulate taste sense

- Teething toys
- Breast feeding
- Bottle feeding
- Brushing gums



Experiments indicate that the flavours in a mother's diet get passed along in the breast milk, and the babies notice.

Early exposure to these "added" flavours may help babies develop preferences for healthful foods later on.



A baby's sense of smell is highly sensitive from birth, Babies are able to recognise the smell of their mothers milk with in hours of birth.

Stronger smells can effect babies in a not so positive way.



Studies have shown that the scent of breast milk can have a calming, pain killing effect on babies.

Smell and memory are processed by the same part of the brain. Exposing babies to a scent after birth can cause them to have a fondness for that smell.



## Top tip

If you're leaving baby with someone while you pop out, leave a top that smells of you (not freshly washed). This can be very helpful in calming baby.

## Best ways to play with a baby to stimulate smell

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- Let baby smell YOU
- Play 'find the nipple'
- Provide comforting smells
- Play 'sniff and say'
- Encourage favourite smells
- Stimulate baby memories - Memory and sense of smell are processed by the same part of the brain
- Try aromatherapy - seek a qualified aromatherapist for the correct advice before using essential oils around newborns



## Where am I?

Proprioception helps us to understand where our body parts are in relation to our other body parts, what those body parts are doing and how much force is required for certain actions.

Receptors in our muscles provide the information to our brains, allowing us to know our legs or arms are crossed without looking at them. This information also tells us how much pressure to put on objects so not to break them or hurt ourselves, this is how we can hold a thin plastic cup without crushing it.



Proprioception sense starts to develop in the womb. Babies will start to make a mind-body map, then once they are born this process will continue through actions like kicking their feet against the floor, studying their hands and holding their feet (around 4 months) bringing their hands to their mouth.

Allowing your baby to interact with her environment without restriction of movement will help this sense develop.

## Ways to play to help the proprioceptive sense develop

Encourage and assist babies in actions like :

- Rolling arms
- Pushing (mini press ups)
- Pulling
- Lifting
- Kicking
- Rolling
- Holding toys like the mini maraca
- Baby Massage
- Baby Yoga
- Tummy time
- Reaching for objects
- Stretching





The vestibular system is known as the balance and movement system, it is the most advanced of the sensory systems.

It is located in the inner ear where it receives input from our other senses. It receives and sends signals regarding rotational (circular) and linear (straight) movements.

It also helps us combat the forces of gravity. Without our vestibular system we would be flopping around.

The vestibular system is important for baby's development in 4 areas:

## 1. Head & Eyes

Coordinates the head & eye movements, so that we can:

- Read
- Visually track a moving object
- Recognise if it's the object moving or if it's our head that's moving

## 2. Muscles

- Our muscles are able to develop their planes of axis
- Sitting still can only be achieved when the balance system is fully developed

## 3. Balance & Equilibrium

- Messages from inner ear canals sent to the brain to tell you what the position of your head is, so that you can control your body and prevent yourself falling over

## 4. Symmetry

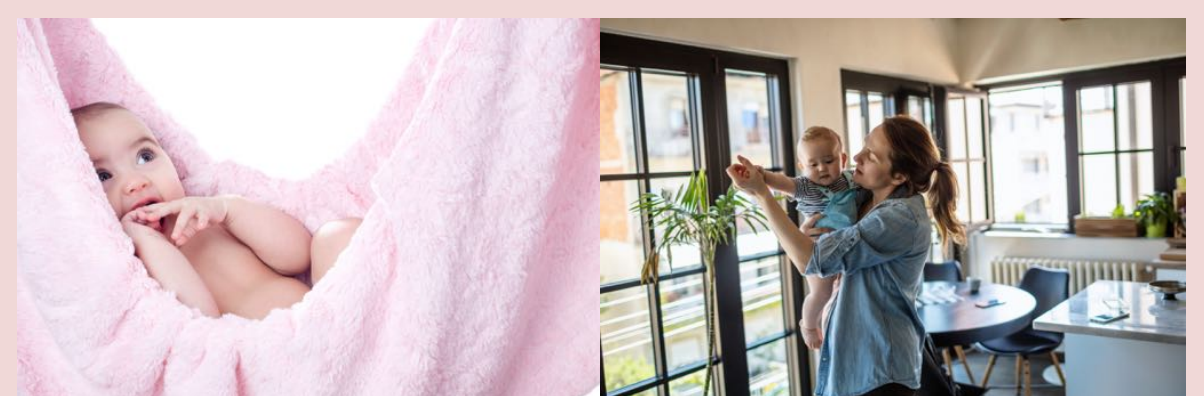
Helps coordinate left side and right side of body for:

- Crawling
- Catching
- Clapping
- Standing up

## Ways to play to help the vestibular system

Any activity that gently and safely rocks, rolls, tumbles, bounces, swings and spins your babies provides them with vestibular stimulation

- Baby hammock
- Dancing with baby
- Zoom to the moon
- Baby Yoga
- upside down baby (yoga move)
- baby head stand
- rolling on a yoga ball





## No one likes being hangry

Interoception is the sense that helps us to experience, understand and react to the physical changes in our bodies.

For example, If we are hungry, we may experience a growling stomach, we may become agitated and cranky as we understand these changes in your body and mood we can react by getting a snack to curb the hunger and restore the equilibrium.

Interoception allows us to experience many body sensations such as feeling hungry, full, hot, cold, thirsty, nauseated, itchy, or ticklish.

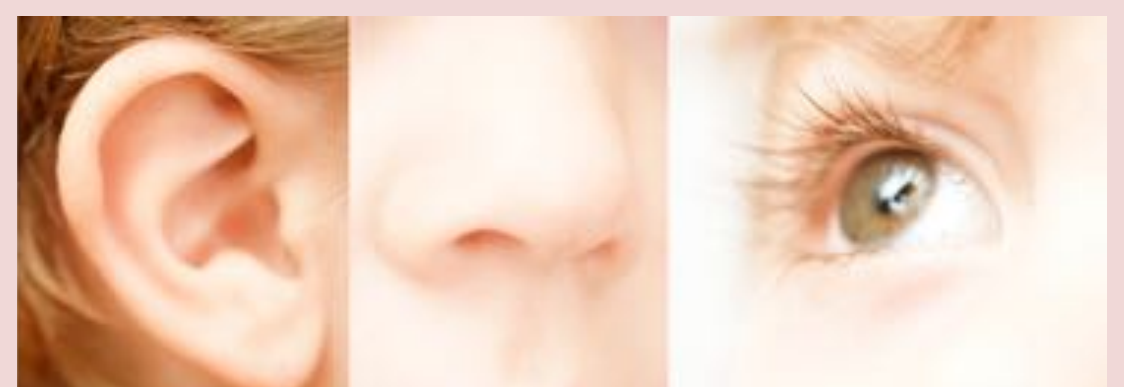
You know if your heart is beating fast or if you need to breathe more deeply. You're able to tell if you need to use the bathroom.

Kids who struggle with the interoceptive sense may have trouble knowing when they feel hungry, full, hot, cold, or thirsty. Having trouble with this sense can also make self-regulation a challenge.

We can help babies start to understand what is happening by talking them through emotions and actions, reading with them and playing games.

## What can we do to help develop Interoception?

- Yoga – focuses on listening to your body and providing good proprioceptive and vestibular input.
- Mindfulness – gives you time to focus on your body and emotional state.
- Breathing exercises – like lazy 8.
- Heavy work activities – involve large muscles of the body





## Criss-cross

A cross-lateral movement is any motion that requires coordinating movement on both sides of the body.

When the movement crosses from one side of the body to the other, it is called 'crossing the midline'.

Crossing the midline starts as soon as your baby begins reaching for objects with two hands - at around 4 months of age.

## Benefits of practising cross-lateral movement

- Energises your body and calms your mind
- Releases tension and stress
- Improves your eye teaming skills – essential for focus, reading, and writing.
- Enhances whole-brain thinking – your left and right hemispheres work together.
- Develops proprioception – your spatial and kinesthetic awareness.

Cross lateral movement also helps with concentration and engagement in activities, as well as hand-eye coordination, gross and fine motor development. Everything needed to be able to read and write.

Problem solving, thinking skills and memory are also increased.

## What can we do to help develop cross-lateral movement?

Yoga – many yoga moves involve crossing the midline

- Song like open, shut them, wheels on the bus
- Place objects that they need to reach for making them cross the body
- Play games where toys get swapped between hands

