

STARTING OUT AS PARENTS

Welcome



Every parent starts their steps towards parenthood with different chances and different challenges. This is an exciting opportunity for you, your baby and your family to consider how you as a family will develop and what is important to you as parents along the way. Whatever make up your family is there are some really useful ideas and links that can support your family from the antenatal period until the point where your child reaches their two-and-a-half-year birthday.

We hope this handbook gives you some ideas and activities to support you throughout this journey.

Keeping well as parents



You are the most important person to your baby, so keeping yourself well is really important. Having a baby can be tricky for parents. Research suggests parents do not always prioritise their own health and wellbeing at this stage and this can have a detrimental effect to parents and their baby. Ensuring you as a parent have awareness of how you are feeling physically and emotionally is really important.

Managing sleep is a huge challenge in the first few months of your baby being here and many parents report to feeling a fog or feeling like the tiredness would never end. This can impact on their mood, their relationships, and their own self-worth, as well as their confidence in parenting. There are many self-help resources that can support you to keep well but if you are struggling we can give you some extra support.

General lifestyle:

For support with smoking, alcohol or healthy eating why not speak to One Small Step:
[Home - One Small Step Devon](#)

For support on how to eat healthily first steps nutrition has some really useful tips for eating well as a new mum
[Infants & new mums — First Steps Nutrition Trust](#)

For support with increasing physical activity for yourself or your child why not visit:
[Exercise in pregnancy - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)
[Physical activity guidelines for children and young people - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)

For ideas of community groups that you and your child can visit:

Research shows a high number of parents can feel lonely and getting out can feel slightly overwhelming. Coming along to our new emerging parent groups is really important as we aim for them to be a supportive environment where it is okay to arrive tired, no make-up on and sleep deprived because it is a group of parents who are consistent to that group, who have all had babies all within four weeks of each other so understand each other a little. There are also many other groups that are able to support you within your community as well as the specific groups that you will access via your children centre link. [Help and support for parents and families in Devon \(pinpointdevon.co.uk\)](#)

Emotional wellbeing

For support with you emotional wellbeing

We are all different and how we manage our emotional wellbeing can be varied

Ways to cope: what might appeal to you?

- Talking to someone you trust about how you feel, such as a parent, sibling, partner, or trusted friend
- Talking to your midwife or health visitor about how you feel
- Keeping active
- Having a healthy diet
- Finding out about different ways to relax, such as yoga, meditation
- Asking for help with things at home, like chores and babysitting
- Asking for support if you are worried about your baby can make a huge difference
- Finding out about how to change your thinking patterns from services such as Talk works can be good
- Discussing the possibility of counselling or medication with my GP is sometimes important
- Keeping a journal of your feelings though pregnancy and beyond can sometimes help you voice how you are feeling



Partners can be impacted also:

We know that having a new baby can impact on your partners emotional wellbeing also. Over the past couple of years we have heard many partners are feeling a little disconnected from being able to ask health professionals questions about pregnancy and their baby in those early days. If you as a partner feel your mood has been impacted speak to your GP. Here are some ideas for partners to support that bonding with your baby:

- Talk and respond to your baby – they will already recognise your voice from pregnancy and the early weeks.
- Skin to skin with Dad, Mum and other significant others including supervised sibling contact can have a huge impact on early brain development.
- Take time to just be with your baby – you are their new world they are just as curious to watch you as you are them.

Some resources you may find helpful through pregnancy and beyond:

There are many Online support options available for mental health and wellbeing:	
	Top Tips for mental health and wellbeing: Top tips to improve your mental wellbeing - Every Mind Matters - NHS (www.nhs.uk)
	We believe that there really is “No Health without Mental Health” and that a healthy parent and a healthy parent-infant relationship is the foundation for good mental health across the life-course and, in turn, a healthy society. https://bit.ly/2WQShcR
	Becoming a parent is an exciting time that brings many challenges affecting parents’ mental health: illnesses such as postnatal depression are not always recognized and treated. PATH will enable women, families and healthcare professionals to prevent, diagnose and successfully manage mild to moderate perinatal mental health illnesses via prepared parenting, leading to happier and healthier families. https://bit.ly/33WW21M
	We are a free, confidential, NHS talking therapy service for people (aged 18+) in Devon (excluding Plymouth), helping you to feel better and giving you the tools and techniques to improve your mental and physical wellbeing. TALKWORKS Mental Health Support for Devon (dpt.nhs.uk) Call 0300 555 3344
	We're Mind, the mental health charity. We won't give up until everyone experiencing a mental health problem gets both support and respect. https://www.mind.org.uk/
	Whatever you're going through, a Samaritan will face it with you. We're here 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Samaritans Every life lost to suicide is a tragedy Here to listen Call us for free on 116 123
	We provide a wide range of NHS services to people with mental health and learning disability needs. We are passionate about promoting good mental health and wellbeing. We strive to use the expertise and resources within our organisation, and through our partnerships, to deliver high quality services that are safe and focused on people's recovery. Pregnant women and new mothers DPT
	Looking after a baby is a very special and wonderful time. We also know it can be a very stressful time and trying to calm a crying baby is something all parents and carers experience. https://www.cry-sis.org.uk/
	As a new dad you may feel excited, but you may also feel left out, unsure or overwhelmed. The DadPad can help by giving you the knowledge and practical skills that you need. The resource will support you and your partner to give your baby the best possible start in life.

In addition to all of this, there are activities that you and those closest to your baby can do to support them with every opportunity to grow and extend their learning – right from the beginning.

You are pregnant – what can your baby do?

Communicating:

Communicating with your baby starts long before the day they are born. Did you know your baby can hear noises, will recognise your voice and those closest to you, will identify different tastes within the amniotic fluid and can see light dark contrasts all from within your uterus long before they are born?

This all means it is never too early to start singing, talking, and engaging with your baby.

Have a look at this video for ideas:



[What can my baby understand and feel in the womb? | NHS -Bingvideo](#)

Touch:

Evidence shows that babies will react to touch, and you stroking your bump. Babies in utero (meaning in pregnancy) have been seen to interact through movement and through twin observations have been seen to interact within the womb and react to certain noises, both good and bad. For this reason, it is really important even in the antenatal stage to think about the type of environment you want your baby to be experiencing. If there are lots of arguments, unexpected noise and a lack of gentle soothing movement this can impact them from an early age increasing the negative hormones within their brains – however if you build an environment that nurtures them and calms them, they will have the positive hormones that help build their brain and gives them regulation and calmness.

Some amazing ideas/ videos of what you can do to engage with your baby whilst pregnant:

[Talking and bonding with baby during pregnancy - BBC Tiny Happy People](#)

Preparing for your baby:

Leading up to the birth of your baby there is so much information that can support you in feeling prepared for your baby's arrival. Why not have a look at our website for information on safe sleep, managing crying, changing relationships, what you can expect, caring for your baby and so much more: [Your baby is due soon: getting you off to a good start - Education and Families \(devon.gov.uk\)](#)

Feeding your baby:

Now is the time you might want to begin to consider how you would like to feed your baby. The evidence is really clear that the best and healthiest type of milk for your baby is breastmilk. Breast milk provides all the food that your baby needs as well as protecting them against many future illnesses.



To get breastfeeding off to a good start we recommend that you feed your baby within the first hour after birth. If you feel that breastfeeding is not going well or is painful it is important to ask for help as making just a few small changes to the baby's position can help improve this. [Positioning and attachment video - Baby Friendly Initiative \(unicef.org.uk\)](#)

Breastfeeding is also a really good way to help build a close and loving relationship with your baby. Having a close and loving relationship with your baby helps your baby feel loved, safe and secure and this also really helps your baby's brain to grow. [Unicef UK Baby Friendly Initiative | Breastfeeding and Relationship Building - YouTube](#)

It can be surprising at how often a baby needs to feed. A breastfed baby will need to feed at least 8-12 times in a 24-hour day. You should look at your baby for signs that your baby is ready to feed. It's important to realise that your baby's feeding will not always follow a set routine. Sometimes they might have an hour between feeds and sometimes two hours. Babies need to feed often because their tummy is tiny and for lots of babies this may be every one and a half to two hours during the day and overnight. If your baby wants to feed often, it's important that you try to rest and catch up on sleep when your baby is sleeping in between their feeds.

We call the signs that baby is telling you that they are hungry feeding cues.

Early feeding cues - Your baby will show 'Early feeding cues' when they are hungry. With early feeding cues your baby may look like they are about to wake up, your baby's mouth may open or your baby will turn their head and seek or root for the breast – the best time to feed your baby is when you see these early feeding cues.

Mid feeding cues - these are shown by your baby when they are really hungry. Mid feeding cues are stretching, more physical movement and baby putting their hand to their mouth.

Late feeding cues - late feeding cues like crying, stronger body movements and baby turning red means that baby will need to be calmed before offering a feed. You can calm baby by cuddling them, putting them skin to skin, talking to them or stroking them. It's best to try and feed your baby when they show the early feeding cues. [The reality of feeding: 10 things you need to know | NCT](#)

Even if you decide not to breastfeed your baby it is important that you feed them responsively. The word responsively for feeding means you continue to observe for those feeding cues, you still read them and allow them to draw the teat into their mouth and observe when they move away – watching for signs that they might have had enough – looking at holding them close and ensuring all that lovely skin to skin contact continues. If you are not breastfeeding you might also want to consider ensuring that the same small group of people – you and possibly one other feed are the only ones to feed them as the research suggests this is better

for your baby and their brain development. [Infant formula and responsive bottle feeding \(unicef.org.uk\)](https://www.unicef.org.uk)

Why not document some memories of your unborn baby during this time.

Your baby is one to four months old – what activities can you do with them?

Getting to know each other from birth onwards:



Your baby loves looking at faces and yours are the best. In their first few weeks your baby's vision reaches the distance from your breast to your eyes. There is a reason for this, as for thousands of years babies needed their mother to fall in love with them, breastfeed them and keep them close to them as a way of ensuring survival, as well as protection and love. Very early on our babies are attracted to light and dark contrasts. It is believed that in part this is what encourages them to look at our eyes as

generally our darker pupil will expand as we look at our baby in response to love hormones. With white paper and a black marker, create several easy to recognise images on each piece of paper. Start with simple patterns (diagonal stripes, bullseyes, checkerboards, triangles). Place the pictures so that your baby can see them (eight to twelve inches from her face). Tape these pictures next to her car seat or crib.

Voice recognition:

Your baby will also recognise your voice and your smell. They will recognise your movements whilst they are in your arms, and these will feel familiar to how they felt when you were carrying them in pregnancy. Our hormones predetermine our babies to look at our eyes and you to look at your baby. Breastfeeding supports this, but however you feed your baby and whether you are mum, dad or someone else who means a lot to your baby looking at each other's face is fantastic for your baby. One activity is to ensure those closest to baby have time just looking at each other – exploring each other's faces and gently having a conversation without words. You will start to notice when your baby is listening to you, when your baby is watching you and when your baby is starting to notice the world around them. You might also recognise some movements that were familiar to you when pregnant.

Skin to skin contact:

Skin to skin contact is really important for the first couple of months. Skin to skin means when your skin touches your baby's skin with no barriers inbetween. Most people do keep their baby's nappy on during this. Skin to skin contact has several important actions and is a great activity to do in the first couple of months and beyond. One of the actions is that it covers your baby in what we call microflora – but this isn't any old microflora no it is your own special brand of microflora just for your family. Microflora is known to be our essential friendly bacteria that is slightly different from one household to another but is essential in keeping us well and healthy.

Skin to skin contact also enables us to hormonally connect with each other. Our body will regulate our baby's temperature and will support their breathing rate. It is a lovely connecting activity for parents to do with their baby and is recognised to enhance calmness in babies.

Have a look at this video that talks about that initial skin to skin contact:

<https://youtu.be/0vzW9qPz3So>

Whether you are Mum, Dad, or identify under a different name give skin to skin contact a try – it is an amazing experience and one that baby will really benefit from.

Startle reflex:

Between one to four weeks babies will startle to sudden noises. This is a normal part of their development. You can help your child with this by holding them close, making eye contact and talking to them. They'll look back at you and begin to understand how conversations work. Even making baby noises will teach your baby how to listen, the importance of communicating and taking turns in a conversation.

Colic hold:

Often babies reach a period of being quite unsettled around 5-6 weeks. There are different holds that can support your baby with this – one being called the colic hold. If you rest your baby down the length of your arm – legs towards your chest and support their chin in the curve of your hand between your thumb and your forefinger. Supporting them with your other hand. You can gently rock your baby and give them a different view. Many parents use this hold supported by their knee and upper leg as baby gets bigger.

Social baby:

Around six weeks your baby is likely to begin to smile. Babies overall are really social beings and love to interact. They will copy your facial movements - so give it a try. Try different gentle facial movements and see what they do. Talk to them about everything you are doing and what is happening around you. Start with simple conversation such as “Are you hungry?” or “Do you want a cuddle?”.

Tummy time:

Try lying them on your chest and see how they move their head. This is great for the earliest tummy time. As they grow you can roll up a towel and support them with spending time on their tummy – always watching them and interacting with them to ensure they do not place their face flat on the floor or get distressed. Have a look at these activities that support tummy time, which also supports the development of their back and neck muscles:

[Tummy time things to do - How to do baby tummy time - BBC Tiny Happy People](#)

It won't be long before your little one is doing mini press ups – get on the floor with them and chat to them at eye to eye level. They will soon start to wriggle and kick and it's not long after this that they begin rolling over, back to front or front to back. This means they can roll off beds or changing tables, so take care not to leave them on their own.

Everyday activities:

Everyday activities become an opportunity to connect and support your baby's development. Talk softly to your baby when feeding him or her, changing his nappy and holding him. Take

turns with your baby when he makes cooing and gurgling sounds. Have a “conversation” back and forth with simple sounds that he can make.

Sing to your baby (even if you don’t do it well). Repetition of songs and lullabies helps your baby to learn and listen.

With your baby securely in your arms, gently swing and sway to music that you are singing or playing on the radio or sing your own lullaby.

As your baby grows, she will become interested in reflections. Try placing a shatterproof mirror close to your baby where she can see it. Start talking and drawing her attention to the mirror. The mirror will provide visual stimulation. Eventually your baby will interact with their reflection and eventually they will understand that it is a reflection of themselves.

Eye coordination:

Part of your baby’s development at this stage is in eye coordination. This is supported initially in that early study of your face. As they grow they observe movement and transitions. One activity you can do is to put a puppet or small sock on your finger. Say your baby’s name while moving the puppet or sock up and down. See whether he follows the movement. Remember baby’s enjoy repetitive movements so give them chance to get used to the movement and once they are following the movement consistently try a new movement.

An opportunity to link sound and eye activity is to hold your baby in your lap and softly shake a rattle on one side of his head, he is likely to turn to that side. Then try swapping sides. Your baby will search for the noise by turning head and searching for the noise with his eyes. Talk him or her through it and tell her how amazing she is to follow it.

Repetition and anticipation

Baby’s generally can start to appreciate anticipation and patterns – why not try laying your baby on his back and touch his arms and legs in different places. Make a certain sound with each touch. Your baby may smile and anticipate the next touch by watching your hand. When you make each sound, you can also name the part of the body you touch. As he gets older you might start to hear the earliest sounds of a giggle. A similar activity is this little piggy went to market. Ensure he is positioned so that you can touch his feet. Gently play with his toes and feet, tickling lightly. Add the ‘This Little Piggy Went to Market’ rhyme, touching a different toe with each verse.

Reading:



Reading to your baby is an absolute must from the beginning of life. Even if he does not understand the story, he will enjoy being close and listening to you read. Have a look at this video:

[Through the Eyes of a Child Films \(ican.org.uk\)](http://ican.org.uk)

The world is an exciting place right from the beginning, so remember to use your environment. Get out for walks either with a sling or a pram to a local park, down the high street or just around the block – talk to your baby about what you are seeing - this will also be good for you and will help you to recover from your birth.

Managing sleep:

Supporting your baby with a safe sleeping routine is really important. We will support you to consider this, but you might like some of these resources to look at also. There are some really good videos that support you with safe sleep:

[How to reduce the risk of SIDS for your baby - The Lullaby Trust](#)

If you are a young parent the Lullaby Trust also have a really supportive page specifically designed by young parents [Young parents support network by young mums and dads | Little Lullaby](#)

Coping with crying

Babies will cry. Sometimes this can be due to tiredness, illness, hunger, too hot, too cold, bored, over stimulated, or just needing to be close. There are a huge variety of reasons a baby might cry but generally crying is the late cue for telling you they need something. Learning about your baby and how to understand your baby is really key to supporting them. We will support you with this. Often the pattern of crying evidences that babies increase crying from 2 weeks and then at around 2-3 months it peaks and then starts to reduce again. For parents it can feel overwhelming and at times parents are left feeling uncertain about how they deal with their crying baby. This is a really good resource for understanding crying [Is for Infant Crying is Normal \(iconcope.org\)](#)

We will of course support you through this but the ICON site has a huge amount of parental information on it: [ICON - Babies cry you can cope - Advice and Support | ICON \(iconcope.org\)](#)

Why not document some memories of your baby during this time.

Your baby is four to eight months old – what activities can you do with them?

Three to five months:

As your baby develops, they start to coordinate their arm and hand muscles, meaning they will start to reach out for objects and learn from objects. They will also start interacting with the world around them. In order to grow and develop, children need you to take the time to spend time with them and let them start building on their experiences.

Four to six months: Starts making noises

At this age babies enjoy making new and different sounds, and by six months, they'll also make repetitive noises. Repetitive songs are brilliant for your baby. Singing songs to everyday activities is great for your baby:

[Songs to sing to baby all day long - BBC Tiny Happy People](#)

Equally having fun singing popular nursery rhymes and songs, especially those with actions, like 'Pat-a-cake', 'Row, row, row your boat' and 'Wind the bobbin up' are a great way to start your child off with their communication. To find some great nursery rhymes have a look at this:

[Nursery rhymes and songs for babies and toddlers - BBC Tiny Happy People](#) If you repeat the sounds your baby makes, he or she will learn to copy you.

Starting at four months: Babies start understanding the world they live in.

Peekaboo is an amazing way to support your baby to understand something called object permanence. This describes the concept that you don't just disappear when you can no longer be seen but have moved out of the line of sight. This continues until around nine months when a child often experiences separation anxiety. Playing games like peekaboo really helps your baby to understand this concept.

Five months: Can hold objects

By five months, babies can lift and hold objects but are unable to let go of them. They will often put things in their mouth to explore the taste and texture.

They'll enjoy shaking things that make a noise, so rattles are great. Shake one around in front of your child so they learn how to make a noise with it.

Try this game:

[Playing with peekaboo - BBC Tiny Happy People](#)

Six months: Introducing solids

Health experts agree that around six months is the best age to introduce solid food. This is sometimes referred to as weaning. Before this, your baby's digestive system is still developing, and weaning too early can increase the risk of infections and allergies.

Weaning your baby with healthy foods, such as fruit, vegetables and yoghurt, will increase the chance of them being healthy in the future. You can also allow your baby to feed themselves using their fingers as soon as they show an interest.

Home-made foods are brilliant, but we recognise life is busy and a combination of homemade and the occasional jar of baby food might be what parents choose. There's nothing wrong with the occasional jar of baby food, but be aware that many contain additives, preservatives and sodium (salt).

We will ensure you have key information around this time but maybe now is the time to have a look at the NHS Start for Life website for getting ready for weaning and when to know that your baby is actually ready:

[Ready Or Not? | Weaning | Start4Life \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)
[Getting Ready | Weaning | Start4Life \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)



Six months: Hand-to-hand co-ordination

At around six months, babies learn to pass things from hand to hand. Finding toys that your baby picks up and explores is fantastic as it helps them to improve their co-ordination.

Singing with your baby provides excellent stimulation because it involves language, music and often movement. Music without words can also be good for your developing baby's mind. Using household objects like a plastic spoon supports your baby to hold the spoon and enables them to explore it with not only their hands but also their mouth. Babies use their mouth to explore objects so make sure anything they hold has softer edges that will not hurt their soft tissue in their mouth and does not have a choking risk associated with them. A soft spoon is also great for banging and dropping – hours of fun!

While sitting on the floor try placing your baby in a sitting position inside your legs. Use your legs and chest to provide only as much support as he needs. This allows you to play with him while encouraging independent sitting.

To extend play try placing a windup toy beside or behind your baby. Watch to see if he/she searches for the sound.

Baby massage and sensory play



Sensory activities are a brilliant way to extend your child's brain development and sensory development. Using soft scarfs, fluffy material, feather boas to gently tickle your child's skin is a great way to give them different experiences. Playing peekaboo and dropping the scarf onto their tummy makes it a game of expectation, and suspense and is gorgeous when they giggle. Baby massage is a lovely activity to do with your child. Your children centre practitioner can support you with this.

Let your baby see herself in a mirror. Place an unbreakable mirror on the side of your baby's crib or changing table so that she can watch. Look in the mirror with your baby too. Smile and wave at her.

Sounds and shapes

Sound and shapes are really exciting experiences for babies that can expand many areas of development. Common household items such as measuring spoons and measuring cups, sieves and plastic jugs make toys with interesting sounds and shapes. Gently dangle and shake a set of measuring spoons where your baby can reach or kick at them. Let him hold them to explore and shake too.

Play voice games, using high pitches and then low pitches, speak in rhyme and click your tongue and whisper. Take turns with your baby. Repeat any sounds made by him. Place your baby so that you are face to face – he will watch as you make sounds.

[Tools for Talking 3-6 months: Starting mini-conversations with babies - BBC Tiny Happy People](#)

[How babies learn through copying others - BBC Tiny Happy People](#)

Other ideas include:

Safely attach a favourite toy to a side of your baby's crib, swing or cradle chair for her to reach and grasp. Change toys frequently to give her new things to see and do.

Fill a small plastic bottle (empty medicine bottle with a child-proof cap) with beans or rice. Let your baby shake it to make noise. Make another shaker using bells. Encourage your baby to hold one in each hand and shake them both. Watch to see if she likes one sound better than another.

Place your baby on his tummy with favourite toys or objects around but just slightly out of reach. Encourage him to reach out for toys and move towards them.

Place your baby in a chair or car seat or prop him up with pillows. Gently roll, bounce and play with a large bouncing ball. Move it slowly up, then down or to the side, so that he can follow movement with his eyes.

With your baby lying on her back, place a toy within sight but out of reach, or move a toy across her visual range. Encourage her to roll to get the toy.

Place your baby in a chair or car seat to watch everyday activities. Tell her what you are doing. Let her see, hear and touch common objects. You can give her attention while getting things done.

Place your baby on your knee facing you. Bounce him to the rhythm of a nursery rhyme. Sing and rock with the rhythm. Help your baby bring his hands together to clap to the rhythm.

Play peekaboo with hands, a cloth or a scarf. Put the cloth over your face first, then let your baby hide. Hold the cloth blocking his eyesight but not against the face and take turns to hide. Encourage him to play.

Your baby will like to throw toys to the floor. Take a little time to play this "go and fetch" game. It helps her to learn to release objects. Give her a box or basket to practice dropping toys into.

Once your baby starts rolling or crawling on his tummy, play “come and get me”. Let him move, then chase after him and hug when you catch him.

Place your baby facing you. She can watch you change facial expressions (big smile, poking out your tongue, widening eyes, raising eyebrows, puffing or blowing). Give her a turn and see what she does.

Why not document some memories of your baby during this time.

Your baby is eight to twelve months old – what activities can you do with them?

Six to eight months: Sits without support

As your baby gets stronger, he or she develops so that she/he can sit unsupported. This is an exciting time as it enables a whole new level of exploration within your baby's world.

We will be seeing you around this time anyway but if your baby is not able to sit unsupported by nine months, talk to your health visitor.

This is a really good time to review the environment your baby lives in, as they will soon be pulling themselves up to stand – some cots at this stage suggest lowering the base down to the lower level so that your baby remains safe and doesn't risk toppling out when they pull themselves up to stand in a few months' time.

Six to nine months: Teething

For many parents it is a myth that teething starts at six months as often babies will start teething long before a tooth can be felt or seen. Other babies can be born with a tooth. However, for most babies they get their first tooth at around six months, usually in the front of their mouth at the bottom. These are often referred to as milk teeth.

During teething, your baby may become restless, but there are ways to relieve the discomfort. Give your baby something hard to chew on, such as a teething ring, a crust of bread or breadstick, or a peeled carrot. Stay nearby in case of choking.

Six to nine months: Beginning to crawl



Babies crawl in a variety of ways and directions. Some babies learn to crawl backwards before they crawl forwards. Some learn to walk without ever crawling. Others are bottom shufflers. As soon as your baby can crawl revisit their world from their angle. Think about what they can access and what they can't. Think about animals, cleaning products and stairs. Consider fitting safety gates to stop them climbing and falling down the stairs.

Baby walkers remain popular but are not recommended due to a variety of safety and developmental reasons. Firstly, they can be dangerous and can cause serious accidents, but they can also reduce your child's natural development within movement and delay them crawling and walking.

Six to nine months: Many babies will begin to pull themselves upright

At this stage of development, children will start to pull themselves up and can stand while holding on to furniture.

This is a really exciting stage and before you know it, you need eyes in the back of your head because your toddler will be eager to discover new things and try to climb. Make sure low furniture is kept away from windows, and that windows are fitted with locks or safety catches to stop babies climbing out.

Seven months: Communication is key

Babies remain hugely social at this stage. Sound communication and activity remain key to their development. They will soon be babbling, pointing and having full conversations so the more you chatter with them, the better their vocabulary and communication skills will become.

Nine to eleven months: Learning games and activities

At this age babies really start to develop wider skills that interact with those around them. At around 9-11 months babies will start to wave and point. This is a real indicator in development and can tell us how your baby is communicating with the world around them. If you are concerned because your baby is not waving or pointing at 11 months speak to your health visitor.

Babies when born have quite a strong grasp reflex, a reflex believed to be left over from our early evolution. As they grow, they learn to enjoy letting go of things or handing toys to someone. This is a great skill and in playing with them they will be keen to share this skill time and time again. The more time and attention you give your baby in general the more they will grow and develop and get a sense of belonging.

At around twelve months the fundamentals of our world can start to influence your child. Learning about shapes through using toys that require your child to put different shapes through matching holes is a favourite and rewarding game for your child. They will rely on you to be part of this play. Whilst doing so you might want to talk about each shape, for example: "That was the round one", or "This is a square - go in Mr square".

Another favourite activity and a somewhat messy one is your baby's desire to feed themselves. Often parents worry about how much nutrition their baby is getting at this stage, but your baby is still getting most nourishment from their milk feeds, so let them experience

feeding themselves. Part of allowing your baby to feed themselves supports hand eye coordination, but it also supports them to learn about the textures, the smells and the appearance of food. Soon he will be able to finger feed an entire meal.

The Start for life website is a brilliant resource for recipe ideas and gives you an idea for quantities for each age group:

[Weaning Recipes & Meal Ideas | Start4Life \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

First steps nutrition also provides some great information on nutrition between 1 to 4 years old.

[Eating well early years — First Steps Nutrition Trust](http://www.firststepsnutrition.org)

Ideas of other activities that support development up to and beyond twelve months old

Your baby will be interested in banging objects to make noise. Give her blocks to bang, rattles to shake or wooden spoons to bang on containers. Show her how to bang objects together.

Play ball games. Roll a ball to your baby. Help him, or have a partner help him roll the ball back to you. He may even throw the ball, so beach balls and soft balls are great for this game.

A good pastime is putting objects in and out of containers. Give your baby a box or plastic container with a few balls from a ball pool or blocks to put in and out of it. He may also enjoy putting socks in and out of the washing basket or taking empty plastic bottle (washed and clean) out of a box or bag.

Equally around nine to twelve months babies start to develop their pincer grip, meaning they can pick smaller items up from the carpet or a tray. This is a great skill to share and develop. One way to develop this is by allowing your child to feed themselves finger food as the practice of picking up certain foods relies on the pincer grip.

Your baby will also start to explore things using his index finger. Let him poke at a play telephone or activity box. He will want to poke at faces. Name the body parts as he touches your nose, ears, mouth and be cautious with your eyes as coordination is still being learnt! Mirrors are also exciting at this age. Let your baby pat and poke at herself in the mirror. Smile and make faces together in the mirror. This is a great video for explaining how effective this can be:

[Copypcat game for 9-12 months - BBC Tiny Happy People](http://www.bbc.co.uk/1/health/2012/09/120912_tiny_happy_people_copypcat_game.shtml)

Sharing books with your baby has value at all ages but at this age they love to engage with pointing and sharing the story of familiar books with you through pointing and patting the favourite pictures in the book.

[Sharing books with toddler - BBC Tiny Happy People](http://www.bbc.co.uk/1/health/2012/09/120912_tiny_happy_people_sharing_books.shtml)

Toys don't have to be expensive. You can make a simple toy by cutting a round hole in an empty cardboard gravy container and giving your baby wooden clothes pegs or ping pong balls to drop inside.

Placing toys on a sofa or sturdy table so that your baby can practice standing while playing also supports them extending their development, but you might want to sit behind them to start with until they learn to stand fully unsupported.

Another great activity is finding a big box that your baby can crawl in and out of. Stay close by and talk to her about what she is doing: "You went in! Now you're out!"

Play hide and seek games with objects. Let your baby see you hide an object under a blanket or a pillow and act surprised when she finds it. If she doesn't uncover the object, just cover part of it. Help her find the object and celebrate together when you find it again.

Dancing is a fantastic way to play with your growing baby. Turn on the music and hold your baby in a standing position and let her bounce and dance. If she can stand with a little support, hold her hands and dance like partners.

Play imitation games like peekaboo. Show pleasure at your baby's imitations of movements and sounds.

Repetition is part of every child's learning. Whether you are reading, playing games or singing rhymes doing it time and time again in response to your baby's enjoyment is really good for them.

Bath time is also a time to enjoy and learn, using bath toys such as floating boats, floating sponges, bath crayons all support your child to learn in a relaxed supervised environment.

Letting your baby play with plastic measuring cups, plastic cups with handles, sieves and strainers, sponges and balls that float in the bathtub are all cheap but effective bath toys that you are likely to have around the home.

As your baby grows so does their decision making and one way of supporting this is to give your child choice. However, babies can become overwhelmed with too much choice so give the choice of two. Offer two toys or the choice of two foods and see which one she picks. Encourage her to reach or point to the chosen object. Babies have definite likes and dislikes!

New places and people are also really good experiences for your baby. Your baby does need you to be there so that you can give them reassurance throughout this, as these can also at times be uncertain experiences. They will learn from your response so surround your baby with those who you feel safe and comfortable around, but remember you are your baby's safe base, and they will likely use you as a central base to return to.

Why not document some memories of your baby during this time.

Your baby is twelve to eighteen months old – what activities can you do with them?



Ten to Eighteen months: Walking alone

Most infants will start independently walking between ten to eighteen months old. When infants start to walk, they can be unsteady on their feet, but can also move very quickly. It is not unusual for them to trip and fall. You can support them to be safe by considering what furniture you have around the house as well as what surfaces that they are walking on.

This is also a great age to start to teach your infant how to climb stairs, but never let them go up and down on their own. Encourage your infant to walk with you (holding your hand or using reins for safety) as soon as he or she is able. It might slow you down, but it is a great way for you both to get some exercise. If you can take your time to just shadow your infant on a walk. You might only get a few paces but what they will explore and share with you will be amazing for both of you.

[Walking is good for language development - BBC Tiny Happy People](#)

If your infant is not walking by 18 months, talk to your health visitor.

Eleven to Twelve months: Enjoys finger foods

Even if your infant doesn't have any teeth, by now they will be enjoying a variety of finger foods. These are small pieces of food they can pick up and hold in their hands and it is a good way to encourage them to chew. You can try firmer finger foods such as breadsticks, cucumber, raw carrots or chunks of cheese. By giving them finger foods, you will be supporting them in further learning to feed themselves and further ability to choose their foods themselves.

Twelve months: Knowing their own name

When infants start to use words, they will learn what the word means from you. Try repeating words to them while they play. Say things over and over again like saying "Where's it gone?" each time you hide something, as this helps them to remember those words and understand the meaning.

Twelve to Eighteen months: Taking an interest in words

As well as saying between six and 20 recognisable words, infants will start to understand many more.

They will also start to use language in play, for example when pretending to feed a teddy or doll or talking on a toy telephone.

The world around them is an interesting place so make sure you undertake listening walks with your infant commenting on the things they can hear or see. If you feel under confident or a little confused by what this might look like, your health visitor will accompany you on one of these walks but in the meantime have a look at this video.

[The benefits of taking your toddler for a walk - BBC Tiny Happy People](#)

With infants the learning of words and language is supported in everyday life as well as reading books, you don't have to read the story as it happens in the book. Sitting down together and talking about the pictures in the book is enough.

Ideas of other activities that support development up to and beyond 15 months

Infants love games at this age and every day activities are a perfect time to add in a game or two. Why not try these:

[Laundry time - BBC Tiny Happy People](#)

[Trolley time - BBC Tiny Happy People](#)

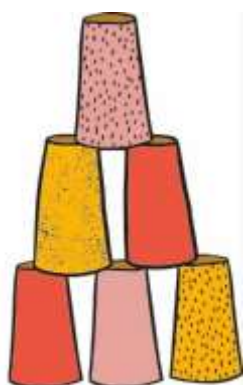
[Exploring objects around the house - BBC Tiny Happy People](#)

Rhyming activities and songs such as 'pat-a-cake' and 'This Little Piggy' are great for your infant's development. Try some new ones and see how many they learn [Singing with toddlers - repeating nursery rhymes - BBC Tiny Happy People](#)).

Make puppets out of a sock or paper bag – one for you and one for your infant. Have your puppet talk to your infant or your infant's puppet. Encourage him to "talk" back.

Infants enjoy push and pull toys. Make your own pull toy by threading yoghurt cartons, or small boxes on a piece of yarn or soft string (about two feet long). Tie a bead or plastic stacking ring on one end for a handle.

To encourage your infants first steps, hold her in standing position, facing another person. Have her step towards the other person to get a favourite toy or treat.



Give your infant containers with lids or different compartments filled with blocks or other small toys. Let him open and remove them and then play "putting things back". This will help your infant to learn how to release objects where he wants them.

Loosely wrap a small toy in a paper towel, tea towel or facial tissue without tape. Your infant can unwrap it and find a surprise. Use tissue paper or wrapping paper as a variation, as it is brightly coloured and noisy.

Tape a large piece of drawing paper to a table. Show your infant how to scribble with large non-toxic crayons. Take turns making marks on the paper. It's also fun to paint with water.

Arrange furniture so that your infant can work her way around the room by stepping across gaps between furniture. This encourages balance in walking.

Infants continue to love making noise. Make sound shakers filling empty medicine bottles or empty but clean secure plastic bottles with different sounding objects like marbles, rice, and pasta. Be careful to secure lids tightly and always supervise them with these if the lid is not a child proof lid.

When your infant “asks” for something he may well vocalise in a certain direction or point. Respond to his signal by naming the object he wants and showing him that you understand – you want your cup, here you are here is your cup. Once they recognise it as their cup you can add a word – you want your cup, here is your red cup.

Play the naming game. Name body parts, common objects and people. This lets your infant know that everything has a name and supports that understanding of the different names.

It is never too early to show your infant that tidying up can be fun. Try playing the “feed the waste bin or toy box game” or “give it to Mummy or Daddy”. Remember to make it a game and add in lots of praise and communication.

Children of this age can show amazing empathy and kindness towards a soft toy or teddy. Play “pretend” with them. Show and tell your baby infant what the teddy is doing (walking, going to bed, eating, dancing, wanting a cuddle. It is also a really good time to start naming emotions – teddy is feeling sad as he wants a cuddle. – now he is happy – he loves your cuddles. See if he will make the teddy move and do things as you request. Take turns.

As your infant is increasingly on the move you can make a obstacle course with boxes or furniture so that your infant can climb in, on, over, under and through it. A big box can be a great place to sit and play.

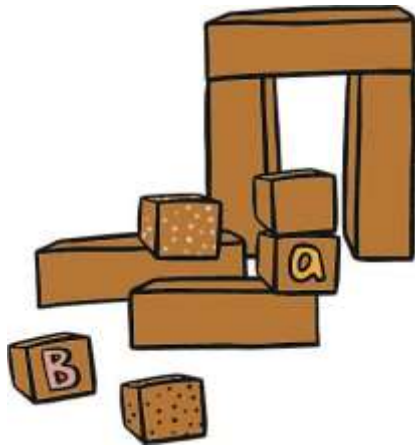
Your infant is learning that different toys do different things. Give your infant a lot of things to roll, push, pull, hug, shake, poke, turn, stack, spin and stir.

Let your infant “help” during daily routines. Encourage him to “get” the cup and spoon for mealtime, to “find” shoes and coat for dressing, and to “bring” the nappy or wipes for changing. Following directions is an important skill for him to learn.

Most infants continue to enjoy music. Remember clapping and dancing to the music is fun and supports balance by moving forward, around and back. Hold her hands for support if needed.

Prepare your infant for a future activity or trip by talking about it beforehand. Describe what you will do when you go and what you will do when you get back. Once back you can also talk about what you did. This helps him become an invested partner within this.

15 to 18 months: Extending play to every-day activities, bricks and special moments



Your infant will gradually learn to entertain themselves for some of the time, but they have to learn from you first. Spend time playing with your infant to help them learn the skills they need such as building with bricks.

It can be hard to find time to play with your infant, especially when you've got other things to do. The answer to this can be to continue to find ways of involving your infant in what you're doing.

Infants learn from everything they do and everything that's going on around them

Infants love to play in water. Put squeezable objects in the bathtub, such as sponges or squeeze bottles, along with cups, bowls and jugs that you can pour in.

Infants are excited about bubbles, and these can supply many a special moment and photo opportunity. Let your infant try to blow bubbles or watch you blow bubbles through a straw. Bubbles are fun to pop and chase too.

Pretend play becomes even more fun at this age. Encourage your infant to take their soft toy for a walk, go to bed, dance, eat and jump. Include the teddy in everyday activities or games. Have a picnic in the park, on the beach or in the back garden if you have one. If winter have a kitchen picnic inside the house and invite all the teddies.

Make instant pudding together. Let your instant 'help' by adding ingredients or stirring. The results are good to eat or can be used for finger painting.

Use boxes or buckets for your toddler to throw bean bags or balls into. Practice throwing by raising the arm up (Overarm) when releasing the ball or bean bag.

Infants love movement. Take him to the park to ride on rocking toys, swings, and small slides. You may want to hold him in your lap on the swing and on the slide at first.

Play hide and seek. Your infant can hide with another person or by herself for you to find (always good to keep part of an eye on where she is heading when you are counting! Then take your turn to hide and let her find you.

Sing action songs together such as 'Ring Around the Rosy', 'Itsy-Bitsy Spider' and 'This is the Way We Wash Our Hands'. Do actions together. Move with the rhythm. Wait for your infant to anticipate the action.

Infants are interested in playing with balls. Use a beach ball to roll, throw and kick.

Your infant may become interested in art activities. Use large non-toxic crayons and a large pad of paper. Felt-tip markers are more exciting with their bright colours. Let him scribble his own picture as you make one.

Fill a plastic tub with cornmeal or oatmeal. Put in kitchen spoons, strainers, measuring cups, funnels or plastic containers. He can fill, empty, pour and learn about textures and use of objects as tools. Tasting won't be harmful.

Play the "What's that?" game by pointing to clothing, toys, body parts, objects or pictures and asking her to name them. If he doesn't respond, name it for him and encourage imitation of the words.

Infants love pictures of themselves, pets and family members. Make a picture book by printing out some photos into a photo album. Your toddler will enjoy looking at these and sharing them with you.

At this age they will begin putting objects together. Simple puzzles (separate pieces) with knobs are great as the knobs support their pincer grip. Putting keys into locks and letters into mailbox slots are fun too and an everyday activity they can do with you.

Hiding items can also be a fun game. Use two containers (plastic cups or plastic cereal bowls) that look the same and a small toy. Hide the toy under one container while your infant watches and ask her "Where did it go?" Eventually you can move the container and ask the same question.

An empty purse or bag is great for collecting things. Your infant can practice putting objects in and out of it. It can also be used to store favourite items. It also helps them identify as they mirror your actions.

Help your infant sort objects into piles. He can help you sort laundry (put socks in one pile and shirts in another). Play "clean up" games. Have your infant put toys on specified shelves or boxes.

Save milk cartons or boxes. Your infant can stack them to make towers.

Lay out your infant's clothes on the bed before dressing. Ask her to give you a shirt, pants, shoes and socks. This is an easy way to learn the names of common items.

Why not document some memories of your baby during this time.

Your baby is twenty to twenty-four months old – what activities can you do with them?

One and a half to two years old: Learning to kick or throw a ball



As they develop new skills, encourage your child and tell them they're doing well. You'll see them respond by laughing and getting excited.

If you want to encourage good behaviour, it's important to be as positive as you can around them.

At this age, children should undertake around 30 minutes of structured activity and at least 60 minutes of unstructured physical activity each day.

Every activity gives opportunity to engage from simple, play to going to the supermarket.

One and a half to two years old:

Children at this age put at least two words together but know many more.

By the age of two, a child will be able to say a range of single words and many children will be talking in short sentences.

If your child is trying to say a word but gets it wrong, say the word properly but place it in a sentence. For example, if your baby points to a cat and says "Ca!", say "Yes, it's a cat!". Don't criticise or tell them off for getting the word wrong.

Your child may also be able to point to parts of their body. Building sentences at this age uses a variety of different skills, copying, mirroring, adding. All of these will come in time, but you can give your child some key support within this:

[Tools for Talking 2-3 years: Building sentences - BBC Tiny Happy People](#)

You may well find that picture book is still an old favourite. You can extend this activity by telling simple stories about what was happening when the picture was taken.

One and a half to two years: Other activities

Make your child an outdoor "paint" set by using a large wider paint brush and a bowl or bucket of water. She will have fun "painting" the side of the house, a fence or the front porch.

Cut a rectangular hole in the top of a shoebox. Let your child insert an old deck of playing cards or used envelopes. The box is easy storage for her "mail".

Set up your own bowling game using plastic tumblers, tennis ball cans or empty plastic bottles for bowling pins. Show your child how to roll the ball to knock down the pins and then let him try.

A good body parts song is 'Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes'. Get more detailed with body parts by naming teeth, eyebrows, fingernails and so on.

Turn objects upside down (books, cups, shoes) and see if your child notices they're wrong and turns them back the right way. He will begin to enjoy playing "silly" games.

Use plastic farm animals or stuffed animals to tell the Old McDonald story. Use sound effects! Give your child some of your old clothes (hats, shirts, scarves, purses, necklaces, sunglasses) to use for dress up. Make sure your child sees herself in the mirror.

"Dressing up" clothes offer extra practice for putting on and taking off shirts, pants, shoes and socks. Children can fasten big zippers and buttons.



Puzzles are fantastic at getting your child to learn about how to hold and place items.

Placing small containers, spoons, measuring cups, funnels, a bucket, shovels and a colander into a sandbox. Don't forget to include cars and trucks to drive on sand roads.

Rhymes and songs with actions are popular at this age. 'Itsy-Bitsy Spider', 'I'm a Little Teapot' are usual favourites. Make up your own using your toddler's name in the song.

Make your own playdough by mixing two cups of flour and three-quarters of a cup of salt. Add half a cup of water and two teaspoons of salad oil. Knead well until smooth, add food colouring and knead until the colour is fully blended. Children will love squishing, squeezing and pounding the dough.

Playing beside or around other children the same age is fun, but usually requires adult supervision. Trips to the park are a good way to begin interacting with other children.

Play the "show me" game when looking at books. Ask your child to find an object in a picture. Take turns. Let him ask you to find an object in a picture and allow him to turn the pages.

Add a few ping pong balls to your child's bath toys. Play a "pop up" game by showing her how balls pop back up after holding them under the water and letting go.

Clean plastic containers with push or screw-on lids are great places to "hide" a favourite object or treat. Children will practice pulling and twisting them to solve the 'problem' of getting the object. Watch to see if your toddler asks you to help.

Make a book by pasting different textures on each page. Materials such as sandpaper, feathers, cotton balls, nylon, silk and buttons lend themselves to words such as 'rough', 'smooth', 'hard' and 'soft'.

Your child is Twenty-four to Thirty months old: What a time to share with them

This is a great stage to add some new action rhymes include 'Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush', 'Jack Be Nimble', 'This is the Way We Wash Our Clothes', 'Ring Around the Roses' and 'London Bridge is Falling Down'.

Play Target Toss with a large bucket or box and bean bags or balls. Help your child count how many she gets in the target. A ball of yarn or rolled-up socks also works well for an indoor target game.

Take time to draw with your child when she wants to get out paper and crayons. Draw large shapes and let your child colour them in. Take turns.

Wrap tape around one end of a piece of yarn to make it stiff like a needle and put a large knot at the other end.

Have your child string large elbow macaroni, pasta, buttons, spoons, or beads. Make an edible necklace out of Circular cereal.

Add an old catalogue or two to your child's library. It's a good "picture" book for naming common objects.

Give your child soap, a washcloth and a dishpan of water. Let him wash a "dirty" doll, toy dishes or doll clothes. It's good practice for hand washing and drying.

Children at this age love outings. One special outing can be going to the library. The librarian can help you find appropriate books. Make a special time for reading (like bedtime stories).

Play a jumping game when you take a walk by jumping over the cracks in the sidewalk. You may have to hold your child and help him jump over at first.

During sandbox play, try wetting some of the sand and making sandcastles with plastic cups or bowls.

Use play dough to make a range of shapes including snakes or balls, rolling out pancakes with a small rolling pin using playdough. Use large cookie cutters to make new playdough shapes.

Children at this age love to pretend and really enjoy it when you can pretend with them. Pretend you are different animals, like a dog or cat. Make animal sounds and actions. Let your child be the pet owner who looks after you. Imagination is wonderful at this age.

Your child will begin to make choices. Help her choose what to wear each day by giving a choice between two pairs of socks, two shirts and so forth. Give choices at other times, like snack or mealtimes (two kinds of drinks, crackers, etc.).

Enhance listening skills by playing music with both slow and fast music. Songs with speed changes are great. Show your child how to move fast or slow with the music.

Decorating boxes with crayons, markers or paints can be a fun activity to do together.

Play 'Follow the Leader'. Walk on tiptoes, walk backward and walk slow or fast with big steps and little steps.

Try a new twist to finger painting. Use whipping cream on a washable surface (cookie sheet, Formica table, patio outside).

Help your child spread it around and draw pictures with your fingers. Add food colouring to give it some colour.

Children can find endless uses for boxes. A box big enough for your child to fit in can become a car. An appliance box with holes cut for windows and a door can become your child's playhouse.

Action is an important part of a child's life. Play a game with a ball where you give directions and your child does the actions, such as "roll the ball". Kick, throw, push, bounce and catch are other good actions. Take turns giving the directions.

Make an obstacle course using chairs, pillows or large cartons. Tell your child to crawl over, under, through, behind, in front of, or between the objects. Be careful arranging so that the pieces won't tip and hurt your child.

Collect little and big things (balls, blocks, plates). Show and describe how big or little the objects are. Ask your child to give you a big ball, then all of the big balls. Do the same for little. Another 'big/little' game is making yourself big by stretching your arms up high and making yourself little by squatting down



Remember as your child grows new exciting opportunities will support them to experience a new world. For all the challenges along the way there are many community groups, professionals, family support networks who are here to support you. Our aim is to help you grow supported.