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2011

Ages and Stages: Infant (0-12 Months) .G2103

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Ages and Stages: Infant (0-12 Months)

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During the first year infants develop quickly, meeting many milestones of early growth. Learn how to recognize these stages and what you can do to help support your infant's growth and development.

Being a parent or caregiver of an infant can be fun and a lot of hard work. Although caring for a baby may seem like an endless cycle of feeding, soothing, and diapering, the first year of a baby's life is a time for rapid growth and development (*Figure 1*). By their first birthday, many infants are beginning to crawl and are even taking their first steps. It's a delight to hear their cooing, babbling, and laughter as they imitate adults and learn to express themselves.

Each day in the life of an infant is filled with observation, exploration, and discovery. To help encourage a responsive and stimulating environment during this first year, keep in mind the following general developmental milestones.

Physical Development Milestones

By Three Months

- Raises head and lifts chin when lying on stomach and may begin to lift up on arms.
- Swipes at hanging objects, and grasps and shakes hand toys. Parents and caregivers should provide rattles, mobiles, or other toys to encourage this skill development.
- Moves arms and legs and “bicycles” with feet.

By Eight Months

- Rolls both ways (back to front, front to back). Always be aware of safety and never leave an infant unattended where he/she could roll off something and be hurt.
- Sits alone steadily and stands with adult support.



Figure 1. Infants develop quickly during the first year. While they may be shy or anxious around strangers, they will share their playfulness and laughter with people they know.

- Uses thumb and finger to pick up an object such as small pieces of food or even dangerous items left on the floor or within their reach (pennies, bottle caps, etc.).
- Crawls backward and forward on stomach.

By Twelve Months

- Transfers objects, such as a small toy, from hand to hand
- Begins to stand and walk alone for short times
- Climbs stairs or other objects

Cognitive Development Milestones

By Three Months

- Explores with mouth and hands
- Follows moving objects such as a mobile and follows people and sounds with eyes and head
- Likes some toys better than others

By Eight Months

- Finds partially hidden objects
- Remembers familiar people and objects for short times
- Solves simple problems, such as making a toy bell ring

By Twelve Months

- Performs make-believe acts with his/her own body (for example, pretending to sleep)
- Imitates gestures
- Explores objects in a variety of ways (banging, shaking, dropping, throwing)
- Uses one word or makes up a word to express a whole thought
- Finger feeds himself or herself

Social and Emotional Development Milestones

By Three Months

- Develops a social smile
- Cries to communicate but then slowly begins to communicate more with face and body (for example, coos, babbles, and smiles)
- Uses sucking to help calm down

By Eight Months

- Is interested in mirror images
- Will respond to his/her name
- Begins to imitate actions, facial expressions, and sounds

By 12 Months

- Anxious or shy with strangers
- Has preferences for certain people and toys
- To gain attention, repeats sounds and gestures made by others
- Develops a sense of humor and laughs a lot

A Guide for Parents and Caregivers of Infants

Be responsive to changes in your baby's feeding and sleeping patterns during the first year. For newborns, be sure to provide physical stimulation during their alert periods based on the baby's preference (singing, feeding, snuggling, etc.).

- The first year of a baby's life is critical in establishing feelings of trust and security. By six months babies are beginning to show a strong attachment to parents or caregivers through smiling and clinging. Create an affirming, caring, and responsive environment for infants by responding quickly and with warmth. When an infant is crying, hold and cuddle him or her. If you are a parent who will be using childcare, plan times for you and your baby to visit a new child care center or home. Spend significant time with caregivers prior to the first day at the child care facility.
- Allow babies space to move freely in a safe, open, baby-proof space.
- Play with baby! Playing with infants not only supports all areas of development, but is a great way to relieve parent and adult stress. The best time to play with an infant is when she or he is relaxed and alert.
- Provide realistic play props and guide older infants in using these to perform simple simulations: "Can you drink juice from the cup?"
- During the first year, babies rely on their five senses to make "sense" of their world. Create a multi-sensory play environment that includes toys of varying textures, colors, and sounds.
- Because older infants enjoy putting toys in their mouth, be sure toys are clean and big enough they won't cause choking.
- Engage babies in thinking, language, memory, and reasoning play experiences. For example, play hiding games such as peek-a-boo. Provide toys in which objects disappear (for example, placing shapes in a sorter box) and use toys that allow babies to cause things to happen like rattles, pull toys, mobiles, or squeeze toys. Such toys require babies to think about things that are not visible and encourage cause-and-effect skill development.

- Read, sing, talk, and laugh with your baby. This helps him or her begin to understand sounds and language. It also creates an opportunity for the infant to imitate words and facial expressions. For example, name objects, persons, or actions using an enthused intonation. Communicate in multiple ways using gestures, facial expressions, and physical touch as well as oral language.
- Model caring and kindness. Display nurturing behaviors and expressions of concern when infants become upset. Show positive emotions using exaggerated facial expressions, tone, and touch. Also encourage positive peer interactions by prompting infants to touch, talk to, and watch other children.

Resources

Books

Developmental Profiles: Pre-Birth through Twelve by K. Eileen Allen and Lynn R. Marotz, published by Wadsworth, Belmont, 2010.

Early Childhood Development: A Multicultural Perspective (4th Edition) by Jeffrey Trawick-Smith, published by Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 2006.

Fun to Play, Ready to Learn Activity Guide (EB2), University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension, 2007.

Websites

Center for Disease Control and Prevention: Infants and Toddlers, <http://www.cdc.gov/parents/infants>

Parenting and Just in Time Parenting Newsletter: www.extension.org/parenting Use code: NE10JITP

UNL Extension Child and Youth Development: <http://www.extension.unl.edu/web/child>

UNL Extension Building Better Children Facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/buildingbetterchildren>

Zero to Three: National Center for Infants and Toddlers: www.zerotothree.org

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Childhood**

Issued November 2011

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