

Everyday activities to support your baby (birth to two years)

Babies grow and develop more in their first few years than at any other time, learning to roll over, sit up, crawl, walk, talk, and form relationships. Parents are their child's first educators, and involvement in their learning significantly impacts educational achievement, with benefits lasting into adulthood. Recent research into brain development highlights the importance of early experiences on a child's development.

This guide aims to provide you with various ways to support your child's learning and development.

Playing together

- Create quiet times at home by turning off music and videos, minimising distractions and noise, to help your child focus and develop listening skills
- Keep toys and books within reach for your child to encourage exploration and learning
- While out in the community, point out local sights like shops, birds, and transport to expand your child's vocabulary and connection to their surroundings
- Get down onto your knees so you are at eye level with your child, to see through their eyes and join in with their play
- Both the indoor and outdoor environments are important for your child's development so try to spend time indoors and outdoors every day.



Talking together

Language development is a foundation for all learning, and one of the best ways to support it is through regular, meaningful conversations with your child.

Babies communicate long before they can speak. They use facial expressions like smiling or frowning, crying to express needs, kick their arms and legs in excitement, and make cooing and gurgling noises

to practise communication. As they grow, they begin pointing to indicate what they want. It's important to respond to these communication attempts — when your baby babbles, talk back to show them that you are interested and listening to them. This is called the 'serve and return' of communication.

Activities to support the development of your child's communication and language

- Sing nursery rhymes and favourite songs together
- Talk to your child about what you are doing during your day
- Visit the library to choose books or attend story time sessions
- While out in your community, point out things you see such as local shops, birds, types of transport
- Listen and respond to your child when they are playing.

Sharing stories together

Sharing stories with your child not only boosts reading skills but also nurtures a lifelong love for books, making it a wonderful habit to start early. Babies enjoy hearing their parents' voices, regardless of the story. Don't worry about reading perfectly - the most important thing is the time spent together.

- Introduce a range of books, poems and rhymes
- Sit in a quiet space to share a book together
- Re-read your child's favourite parts/pages
- Talk about their favourite characters
- Have board and cloth books for your baby to look at
- Talk about the pictures you can see and the story
- Use your child's favourite toys to tell them a story.



Physical development

Children learn by being active, which also develops a positive sense of well-being, so try to make each part of your day an active time.

- **Create space:** Set up areas where your baby can freely explore movement. Provide safe opportunities for them to pull themselves up, crawl, and climb
- **Tummy time:** Spend time together on the floor with your baby on their tummy. This activity strengthens neck muscles and helps develop coordination and balance
- **Daily walks:** Take your baby out for a walk each day to experience the sights, sounds, and smells of the outdoors. When possible, provide time for your toddler to get out of the pushchair and walk alongside you

- **Action rhymes:** Sing songs like 'Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes' to encourage movement and body awareness
- **Follow the leader:** With your toddler, play games where they mimic your actions. You can jump, hop, skip, or touch your toes
- **Ball game:** Sit on the floor and roll a ball back and forth with your toddler, encouraging them to reciprocate
- **Hide and seek:** Ask your toddler to close their eyes while you hide a toy. Then, search together to find it
- **Target practice:** Use a box or a washing-up bowl as a target for your child to throw a ball or rolled-up socks into
- **Body awareness:** Touch and name different parts of your baby's body, such as toes and hands, during playtime
- **Dance and move:** Play music and encourage your baby or toddler to move along with it; join in and make it a shared, joyful activity.



Developing personally, socially and emotionally

Children thrive when they are engaged in nurturing relationships that foster a sense of trust, security, and confidence. They seek connections that make them feel loved and valued. Here are some key ways to support their emotional and social development:

- **Provide comfort and support:** Establishing strong, warm, and supportive relationships with children helps them understand and express their own feelings, and develop empathy; stay close by your child when you're in an unfamiliar place, so that they feel secure
- **Enable friendships:** Encourage interactions with other children to help them learn how to form good friendships, cooperate with others, and resolve conflicts in a peaceful manner
- **Role play:** Encourage your child in play-based or everyday experiences, such as feeding their teddy
- **Discuss emotions:** Talk about feelings and name emotions such as 'sad' and 'happy' as you share books or play together
- **Role model:** Use opportunities to model social interactions such as turn taking and sharing
- **Promote independence:** Offer your child a choice wherever possible, for example, offer a choice of apple or banana as you hold up each fruit.

Mark making

Mark making refers to a child's initial writing attempts – remember that to begin with this will just be the child noting cause and effect. For example, when they notice that their fingers leave a mark in the sauce spilt on their highchair tray after a meal. Children often show natural curiosity about patterns, especially those that they are making. Provide activities to support your child's curiosity and development in engaging mark making:

- **Provide a variety of resources:** Have a tools for mark making such as chunky crayons, large paper, finger paints
- **Sensory play:** Use a shallow tray filled with sand, lentils, or rice for tracing patterns or letters.
- **Messy play:** Mix cornflour with water to create gloop, allowing them to draw shapes that magically disappear
- **Provide variety:** Follow your child's interests and keep mark making fun by offering alternative ways, such as driving toy cars through a plate of paint and then over paper to create tracks or by using toy animals to make footprints.



Further information

- No cook playdough recipe: <https://bit.ly/2RuB2L0>
- Literacy Trust: <https://bit.ly/3AbkcUK>
- Change4Life: <https://bit.ly/3a9nhtK>
- Treasure baskets: <https://bit.ly/2tV82Dd>
- The Early Years Foundation Stage: <https://bit.ly/2XwGfYc>