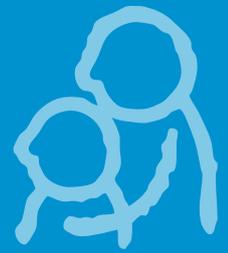


Living with babies

Parent easy guide 50



Parenting SA

Having a baby is the start of one of the most exciting journeys in your life. Babies bring the excitement of watching a new person grow and develop, the love that comes with caring, and the responsibility of knowing that someone depends on you for everything. Sometimes this also means a shortage of time and money, the feeling that everything is getting out of control and a complete change in the way you live.

For most parents, bringing home a new baby is not what you expected. You may not be ready for the very strong feelings you will have or for the many changes that having a baby brings. It is important to remember that this is what happens for everyone - you are not alone. Babies learn more and grow faster than they will at any other time in life. Make the most of this time with your baby!

*This PEG uses 'he' and 'she' in turn.
Change to suit your child's sex.*

Getting to know your baby

In the first months of life your baby is in a very strange world that she knows nothing about. In these months she needs to learn from you that her world is safe and that there are people who will look after her. She knows this when you meet her needs for food, comfort, warmth and love. When you do this she is learning to love you and to trust you. She also is learning that she is lovable and able to do things.

- > Your baby needs to be fed, kept clean, comfortable and warm (but not too hot). She needs to sleep when she is tired, be fed when she is hungry and have someone to play with her and cuddle her when she is alert and awake.
- > She needs you to talk to her about what you are doing as you change, wash and feed her. She needs you to hold and stroke her.
- > She needs to learn about the world through you telling her when something is going to change - that you are going to pick her up, change her nappy, feed her or put her to bed. This way she learns what to expect and you help her to feel safe.

- > She needs to be starting to learn that she can do things, very simple things at first, like making a noise when she hits a rattle.
- > If you think she is fun and enjoyable and you show it, she will learn to feel good about herself.
- > If you enjoy feeding time and spend time talking to her and playing with her she will start to learn to enjoy being with people.

Crying

Crying is very important for babies. Because they are so helpless, crying is the only way babies know how to get their needs met. Babies cry to make sure they survive, so it is important we respond.

- > Crying is one of the most worrying things for parents. Sometimes it is hard to know why your baby is crying or what is needed. Sometimes it seems that nothing you do helps.
- > Parents can even start to think that the baby is just crying to annoy them. Babies do not know how others might feel at the sound of their crying - they only know they are miserable.
- > As you come to know your baby, you will learn what some of the cries mean and it takes a while to learn what helps him. Your baby will learn to feel safe and cared for because you come to feed him, comfort him, or help with whatever he needs.



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Helping parents be their best

Some reasons babies cry are:

- > being hungry or thirsty
- > being too hot or too cold
- > needing comfort
- > not being well
- > needing a nappy change
- > needing closeness with you
- > having pain (eg tummy ache or earache)
- > being frightened, bored or lonely.

Babies under 6 months old

Babies do not cry to make you come to them. They are not old enough to remember you when you are not there. They cry because they need something, but they don't know what they need. You can find out what they need by trying out what makes your baby feel better. If you attend to babies' needs when they cry they will learn that the world is a safe and friendly place to be. As they get older they will cry less.

You can help settle your baby by:

- > making sure your baby is not hungry or uncomfortable
- > picking up your baby and holding him close to you if he is frightened or lonely
- > holding your baby upright against your shoulder if she is uncomfortable
- > rocking or pushing the stroller over a little bump
- > finding out what your baby seems to like (some babies are helped by a dummy and some like music or sounds like a clock ticking)
- > watching for what happens when he is more settled and learning to know him and what he needs.

Babies over 6 months

Babies may cry from being uncomfortable or hungry, or because they remember you when you are not there and they want you. This is sometimes called separation anxiety. It is normal and a part of their love and trust for you. They slowly learn that you are there for them and you won't leave them for long, so they start to feel safe without you, but this takes time to learn. Often babies at this age will wake at night or are harder to put to bed because they miss you and they don't yet understand that you always come back.

You can help by:

- > always letting your baby know when you leave her. Wave goodbye and let her know when you return
- > playing little games such as peek-a-boo to help her get used to your going and coming
- > leaving her only with people she knows well and feel safe with

Sleeping

The amount of sleep babies need varies a great deal between babies and it gets less as the baby grows. Some babies sleep better where it is very quiet. Others seem to settle best with ordinary household sounds around. Some babies sleep better if they are wrapped in a sheet, others like their arms loose. Using a little routine when you are putting your baby down will help your baby to learn about going to sleep. As he gets older you might try something like a little song (or prayer), kiss everyone goodnight, find the dummy (if he has one) and then a special kiss from you with gentle words like, 'I love you'.

Safe Sleep

- > You must make your baby's sleeping situations safe for her because she cannot know how to do this.
- > It is important that babies sleep on their backs and do not have their heads covered.
- > Make sure that your baby's head is not able to slide under the bedclothes or get trapped against the head of the cot by making up the bed at the foot of the cot.
- > Look for the Australian Standards label when buying a cot.
- > Place your baby's cot next to your own bed for the first six months
- > As your baby gets older, if you need to reassure her at night, try sleeping on a bed in her room or putting her cot in your room so you can get some sleep as well.
- > Use only light bedding to avoid overheating (doonas, thick quilts and heavy blankets can make the beds too hot). Pillows are not needed for babies.
- > Do not let your baby sleep on a waterbed or bean bag.
- > Remember babies like to play with anything within their reach. Place the cot away from heaters, power points, lights, hanging mobiles and curtain cords.
- > Soft toys and pets can smother babies. Check that pets cannot get into the bedroom.
- > Do not smoke inside your home, especially in the same room as your baby, or in the car, as the cigarette smoke is harmful to babies.

Bathing your baby

It isn't necessary to bath your baby every day if he does not like it. You can wash your baby's face and bottom when you need to without giving him a bath. Find out the time when your baby enjoys a bath most. It is usually not when he is very hungry. He will probably enjoy it most when he is calm after a feed. If your baby is unsettled between feeds a bath may help him feel better and go to sleep.

Teeth and teething

- > If your baby has pain with teething you can give him something firm to bite on (eg cold teething ring or dummy). Rusks can be useful. If there is a lot of pain a teething gel may help.
- > Some babies prefer mushy food while teething because it needs less chewing; others prefer something to chew.
- > Your baby's teeth can be damaged by sucking on a bottle of milk or sweet drink for long periods. This can cause early tooth decay. If your baby needs something to suck on between feeds (as long as she is not hungry), try cool water in the bottle or a dummy without any sweetener (like honey) on it. It is best not to put babies to sleep with a bottle.

You can clean your baby's teeth gently with a soft cloth as soon as they come through.

Immunisation

Immunisation is an important way to protect babies from some very serious illnesses. Find out about immunisation to help protect your baby from infectious diseases. Ask your doctor or child health nurse.

The first immunisation is for hepatitis and is offered just after birth in hospitals. More are then due at two months of age.

Discipline

Discipline is about teaching, not punishment. There are lots of things you can teach babies as you care for them.

Punishment is not useful for babies. They don't understand why they are being hurt and it is likely to make them afraid when they need to be learning to trust.

After 6 months or so you can say 'No' and give a simple response when your baby is doing something wrong. For example: 'No - that hurts'. Don't expect your baby to be able to really learn what to do and what not to do for many months yet.

It is very important not to shake a baby because it can cause brain damage. If you are feeling very angry, put your baby somewhere safe and take a break or call someone until you can get back in control of your feelings.

Songs and play

Babies enjoy little games with parents from the time they are very young. These games help them to learn about the world. Some things babies enjoy are:

- > mimicking games, eg baby pokes her tongue out and you do it back (leave plenty of time for baby to take her turn)
- > simple little songs and rhymes while you rock or gently jiggle your baby on your knee
- > brightly coloured mobiles that move in the breeze for your baby to look at. Mobiles can be easily made by hanging coloured shapes from a coat hanger and changing them from time to time
- > a walk outside in the stroller to look at leaves or grasses moving
- > time on the floor on her tummy to kick (always supervised) helps her to develop muscles for crawling and head control
- > gentle stroking or touching games (with rhymes)
- > things that they can hit or push that make a noise.

Remember not to play 'rough' games with babies such as throwing them up in the air, lifting or pulling them by an arm or playing loud music. These actions can really hurt.

Reading

Reading with babies brings together many of the things they need most to grow and develop - closeness, safety, touch, seeing, hearing and learning about sounds, as well as gradually learning about what they mean? Sharing a book, looking at pictures and hearing your words is a very special time. Babies learn that reading is a 'feeling good' time and a few minutes every day will have an impact on their development.

Attachment

Attachment is the pattern of behaviour between a baby and carer that allows the baby to feel safe and free to learn and explore. It is not present at birth but develops over the first few months of life in response to the type of care. Secure early attachment is an important foundation for healthy development and for coping with all the challenges that growing up brings. Unresponsive, erratic or threatening care can lead to attachment problems that have an ongoing negative effect on development.

Who do babies attach to?

- > Babies develop attachment relationships with their main carers over the first few months of life.
- > They can form attachments with more than one person. If there is a problem with the main carer, e.g. mother is depressed or very distracted, a secure attachment with another caring person can help to balance this and give baby a positive relationship model.
- > It can be hard for babies to develop secure relationships when there are too many different carers and relationship patterns to adjust to.

What is attachment behaviour?

- > Babies and toddlers try to get comfort and protection from the people they are attached to. All babies have this behaviour in order to protect themselves from danger.
- > This can be by smiling, cooing, crawling, following, holding out their arms, crying. When your child gets the appropriate response e.g. eye contact, a smile, a touch or a cuddle, and feels safe. The attachment seeking stops and your child is free to relax, play, explore and learn again.
- > If there is not an appropriate response e.g. your baby is ignored or punished, he continues to feel anxious or afraid and continues the attachment behaviour. Some babies who are very afraid give up trying.

Baby's signals

All babies are different and will have their own special ways of showing what they need. Responding to your baby's signals not only helps to develop secure attachment, but is also the beginning of two-way communication. It is important to respond to these signals in ways that meet your baby's needs. It is the beginning of developing a sense of independent self.

- > To show they need attention babies make eye contact, make little noises, smile, copy gestures or look relaxed and interested.
- > To show they need a break, or perhaps a different or gentler approach babies may look away, shut their eyes, try to struggle or pull away, yawn, look tense and unsettled, or cry.

What you can do

- > Find out about how babies grow and learn so you have reasonable expectations. Often parents' concerns stem from a lack of understanding about child development.
- > Think about, treat, and talk to your baby as an individual with his own likes and dislikes.
- > Learn to know your baby's signals, what his messages mean and then respond.
- > Don't startle your baby.
- > Be flexible – don't stick to a set routine if it doesn't suit you or your baby.
- > Be prepared for changes e.g. just when you think you've worked out your baby's routines his rapid growth means you need to respond differently to his changing needs.

Parents' feelings

- > Many new parents feel very happy about the changes in their lives. There can also be some less happy feelings that sometimes you don't think you should have.
- > Some parents may be disappointed with the sex of their baby or resentful if they weren't wanting another child.
- > It can be hard accepting things you weren't prepared for such as a premature baby, a baby with a disability or a multiple birth.
- > It can be very upsetting to have your baby crying and not be able to stop it - sometimes so upsetting that you feel like hurting your baby or leaving. If this happens make sure she is safe and then leave the room until you feel better. Sit quietly, scream into a pillow, play some music, make a cup of tea or ring someone who understands. You may find putting your baby in a stroller and walking out in the fresh air helps. Know yourself - do whatever helps you to feel relaxed.
- > It can be a worry that there isn't much time to keep your home tidy or, if you have a partner, to enjoy time together as a couple.
- > Sometimes fathers feel shut out, or even jealous, because all the mother's attention seems to be going to the baby.
- > Parents may worry about how they will be able to afford all the extra costs that come with having a child.
- > Share your feelings with your partner or a close friend.
- > Often new mothers feel a bit 'down' and weepy. This is commonly called 'baby blues' and many women have this 'let down' feeling after the huge physical and emotional experience of having a baby. These feelings usually don't last very long. Make sure you get as much rest as you can, take care of yourself and ask for support.
- > Mothers sometimes get very sad, tired and irritable and can't seem to shake it off. If these feelings are worrying you it is important to talk about them with your partner, a close friend or your doctor.

What parents can do

- > All new parents need support. If you are parenting on your own, this is even more important. Don't be ashamed to say 'Yes' when anyone offers to help you.
- > Take care of yourself.
- > Make sure you take some time out for yourself, and to do some things with your partner, spouse or a friend.

Don't be too proud to ask for information or advice. All parents at some stage find parenting difficult. It is not a sign of failure.

Reminders

- > Going to babies when they cry does not spoil them, rather it is the best thing you can do for them.
- > Never shake a baby - it can cause brain damage.
- > Babies are likely to cry less later on if you respond quickly when they are young.
- > Remember babies do not sleep all the time and they sleep less during the day as they get older.
- > Babies like company, just as we do. When they are awake they don't like to just lie there looking at the ceiling. They love you to talk and be with them.
- > Watch for and enjoy the little changes as your baby grows and learns.
- > Take care of yourself. Make sure to do some things you enjoy regularly. Get some exercise and eat well.
- > Sometimes you get different advice from all sorts of people. If it feels right for you and your baby is happy it is probably okay. If you are in doubt ask someone who knows about babies.
- > Don't be ashamed to ask for and accept help from people around you. Everyone needs help sometimes and having a new baby is one of these times.

Contacts

Parent Helpline: Tel 1300 364 100

24 hours a day, 7 days a week for advice on child health and parenting

Child and Family Health Centres: Tel 1300 733 606

9am - 4:30pm, Monday to Friday to make an appointment at your local Centre

Breastfeeding Helpline: Tel 1800 686 2 686

24 hours a day, 7 days a week for breastfeeding information and support

SIDS and Kids: Tel 1800 308 307

24 hours a day, 7 days a week for advice and referral to your local office

Kidsafe SA: Tel (08) 8161 6318

9:30am – 4pm for child safety information

Websites

www.parenting.sa.gov.au

For other Parent Easy Guides including: Being a parent, Single parenting, Being a Dad, Being a Mum, Sleep, About babies, Right from the start, Milestones

www.cyh.com

For parenting and child health information

For more information

Parent Helpline 1300 364 100

Parenting SA

Children, Youth and Women's Health Service

Telephone (08) 8303 1660

Internet: www.parenting.sa.gov.au

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Parent Easy Guides are free in South Australia

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