



Illustration by  
Billy Nuñez, age 16

# HOW DO INFANTS LEARN?

## INFANTS ARE AMAZING

- As soon as they are born, infants start to learn about the world from their experiences.
- Infants can see and hear what is happening around them and can communicate their needs and interests to others.
- Parents can help their babies learn by playing with them.
- Parents can help give infants a strong start to life.

Infants have the ability to see faces and objects of different shapes, sizes, and colors. They can tell the difference between the voices of their parents and others. We're surprised when they mold their bodies into our arms or shoulders. We marvel at how they came into the world able to suck, communicate certain needs by crying, and, at times, calm down on their own. Most infants can do all of these things as soon as they are born.

**Babies need and love to be held and touched. You will never spoil your baby by showing lots of love and by holding your child often.**

## YOU ARE YOUR BABY'S FIRST TEACHER

First experiences have a very important effect on the future. That's why you are so important to your baby's growth and development. The growth of your baby's brain is affected by the care and experiences you provide.

Loving attention helps new brain cells connect in ways that help infants:

- Feel secure and confident.
- Make sense of new ideas and information.
- Grow healthy bodies.

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

### Use your face and voice.

Infants love to look at you and hear your voice. In fact, faces, with all their expressions, usually are more interesting than toys. Spend time talking, singing, and laughing. Play games of touching, stroking, and peek-a-boo.

### Take turns.

Make faces, sounds, and movements that your baby can copy. Then you can copy the things that your baby does. This is how infants learn to communicate.

### Repeat things again and again.

Infants need to practice something until they are sure of how it works. That's why it's important to do the same thing over and over again with your baby. Make a game out of repeating things. Besides learning about how things work, your baby will learn what to expect of people and situations.



## Read.

One of the best ways infants learn to talk is when they are read to or told stories. Make a habit of reading to your baby every day. Starting good reading habits at this young age will help your baby continue to learn new things later on.

Since infants sleep more than older children, you will need to alternate learning activities with rest. Rest time is as important as being awake. When awake, infants tend to be more alert if they are approached calmly and if they are in a place without too much noise or confusion.

## THINGS TO WATCH FOR

Your baby has a different style or personality from all other babies. It's fun to get to know your baby's likes, needs, and abilities. Find out how your baby relates to other people and situations.

- Some infants like more activity, some like less.
- Some infants are louder when they laugh or cry, some are quieter by nature.

All infants let us know when they have had enough. Some ways your baby may tell you that it's time for a nap are:

- Avoids making eye contact
- Becomes sleepy or fussy, may cry a lot
- Coughs or spits
- Rubs eyes

## TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Children grow faster in their first year than at any other time in their lives. This will take a lot of your time and energy. You need to be healthy and happy to give your child the best start possible.

When you feel good about yourself, you will be helping your baby feel happy and secure too. This is why you need to find the time to take care of yourself. Let people know when you need support or help. After you are rested, you will have more energy and you will be able to have more fun with your baby.

## OTHERS WHO CARE FOR YOUR BABY

Developing a close bond with parents and family members is important. It helps infants form positive relationships with others.

- By letting other people hold and talk with your baby when you are around, your baby learns how to relate to other people.
- When you cannot be with your baby, it is best if the same few trusted people are the caregivers. Your baby will learn to expect and enjoy their company and kindness.
- If you decide to leave your baby with a relative, friend, or professional child care provider, visit and stay for a while the first few times you leave your baby. This way, you will feel confident about the safe and loving care being provided.

## A STRONG START FOR LIFE

**Infants spend the first year learning to feel secure about being loved by you.**

Love—expressed in the ways mentioned here, and in many other ways by you—will give your child the physical strength to fight illness, the emotional strength to feel confident, and the ability to learn new things.



### Being curious is how infants learn.

What looks like just play—going through drawers, emptying wastebaskets, ransacking kitchen cabinets—is the way your child finds out how the world works. Infants are learning about shapes, textures, and sizes. They also are discovering that some things are safe to eat and others are not.

Make sure nothing dangerous goes into your baby's mouth.

### TV is not recommended for children younger than age 2 years.

Too much television is not good for early brain development—even educational TV isn't good for infants. The brain is developing rapidly at this age. Calmly watching TV does not help the brain grow. During the first 2 years of life, children need activities that stimulate their brains.



Connected Kids are Safe, Strong, and Secure

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

The American Academy of Pediatrics is an organization of 66,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists, and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety, and well-being of infants, children, adolescents, and young adults.

This project was supported by Grant No. 2001-JN-FX-0011 awarded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

HE50383

Graphic design and illustrations by Artists For Humanity, a non profit arts and entrepreneurship program for Boston teens.

## American Academy of Pediatrics



DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™