

others. By 4 months old, infants laugh aloud.

Play is a major socializing agent and provides stimulation needed to learn from and interact with the environment. By 6 months old, infants are very personable. They play games such as peek-a-boo when their heads are hidden in a towel, they signal their desire to be picked up by extending their arms, and they show displeasure when a toy is removed or their faces are washed.

Attachment

The importance of human physical contact to infants cannot be overemphasized. Parenting is not an instinctual ability but a learned, acquired process. The attachment of parent and child, which often begins before birth and assumes even more importance at birth (see [Chapter 7](#)), continues during the first year ([Fig. 9-9](#)). In the following discussion of attachment, the term *mother* is used in the broad context of the consistent caregiver with whom the child relates more than anyone else. However, with society's changing social climate and sex-role stereotypes, this person may well be the father or a grandparent. Studies on father–infant attachment demonstrate that stages similar to maternal attachment occur and that fathers are more involved in child care when mothers are employed (although mothers continue to do the majority of infant care). Additional research has shown that inexperienced, first-time fathers are as capable as experienced fathers of developing a close attachment with their infants. Fathers verbalized more positive feelings of love and affection toward their newborns when they were able to have close physical contact, such as holding their infant ([Feeley, Sherrard, Waitzer, et al, 2013](#)). Fathers have also been reported to have a significant role in supporting mothers in the perinatal period. Studies of high-risk infants demonstrate the need for a father's involvement in the infant's care because of high demands of the infant and/or restrictions of the mother ([Feeley, Sherrard, Waitzer, et al, 2013](#)). Research demonstrates that fathers develop feelings of attachment with their offspring and that their relationship with the infant is an important factor in the mother's emotional well-being. With many single-parent families in existence, a grandmother (or other significant caretaker) may become the primary caretaker. It is important for nurses to recognize that infant–parent attachments may be present or absent