



Emotional & Social Development in Babies: Birth to 3 Months

By two months of age, your baby will spend much of each day watching and listening to the people around her. She learns that they will entertain and soothe her, feed her, and make her comfortable. During her first month, she'll experiment with primitive grins and grimaces. Then, during the second month, these movements will turn to genuine signals of pleasure and friendliness.



Your baby's first true smile

If you've experienced your baby's first true smile, then you know it's a major turning point for both of you. All the sleepless nights and erratic days of these first weeks suddenly seem worthwhile, and you'll do everything in your power to keep those smiles coming.

For her part, your baby will suddenly discover that just by moving her lips she can have "conversations" with you. Smiling will also give her another way besides crying to express her needs and exert control over what happens to her. The more engaged she is with you and your smiles and the rest of the world around her, the more her brain development advances, and the more she'll be distracted from internal sensations (hunger, gas, fatigue) that once strongly influenced her behavior. Her increasing socialization is further proof she enjoys and appreciates these new experiences. Expanding her world with these experiences is fun for both of you and important to her overall development.

At first your baby may seem to smile past you without meeting your gaze, but don't let this disturb you. Looking away from you gives her some control and protects her from being overwhelmed. It's her way of taking in the total picture without being "caught" by your eyes. In this way, she can pay equal attention to your facial expressions, your voice, your body warmth, and the way you're holding her.

Getting to know each other

As you get to know each other, she'll gradually hold your gaze for longer and longer periods, and you'll find ways to increase her tolerance—perhaps by holding her at certain distances, adjusting your voice level, or modifying your expressions.

Emotional/Social Milestones for Your One-to Three-Month-Old

- Begins to develop a social smile
- Enjoys playing with other people and may cry when playing stops
- Becomes more communicative and expressive with face and body
- Imitates some movements and facial expressions

By three months, your baby will be a master of "smile talk." Sometimes she'll start a "conversation" with a broad smile and cooing to catch your attention. Other times she'll lie in wait, watching your face until you give the first smile, then beam back her enthusiastic response. Her whole body will participate. Her hands will open wide, one or both arms will lift, and her limbs will move in time with your speech. Her facial movements also may mirror yours, especially if you stick out your tongue!

Like adults, your infant will prefer certain people. And her favorites, naturally, will be her parents. Grandparents or familiar sitters may receive a hesitant smile at first, followed by coos and body talk. By contrast, strangers may receive no more than a curious stare or fleeting smile. This selective behavior shows she's starting to sort out who's who in her life. [Back to Top](#)

At about three or four months, she'll become intrigued by other children. If she has brothers or sisters, you'll see her beaming as they talk to her. This fascination with children will increase as she gets older.

These early exchanges play an important part in her social and emotional development. By responding quickly and enthusiastically to her smiles and engaging her in these "conversations," you'll let her know she's important to you, can trust you, and has a certain amount of control in her life. By recognizing her cues when she's "talking," you'll also show you are interested in and value her. This contributes to her developing self-esteem.

How your baby communicates needs

As your baby grows, communication will vary with her needs and desires. On a day-to-day basis you'll find she has three general levels of need, each of which shows a different side of her personality:

- When her needs are urgent—hunger or pain, for instance—she'll let you know. She may do this by screaming, whimpering, or using desperate body language. In time you'll learn to recognize these signals so quickly you usually can satisfy her almost before she knows what she wants.
- When your baby is peacefully asleep, or alert and entertaining herself, feel reassured you've met all her needs for the moment. This is a welcome opportunity to rest or take care of other business. Playing by herself provides you with wonderful opportunities to observe—from a distance—how she is developing important new skills such as reaching, tracking objects, or manipulating her hands. These activities set the stage for self-soothing, which will help her settle down and ultimately sleep through the night. These are especially important skills to learn for more colicky or difficult-to-console babies.
- Each day there will be periods when your baby's obvious needs are met but she's still fussy or fitful. She may whine, have agitated movements, or exhibit spurts of aimless activity between moments of calm. She probably won't even know what she wants, and any of several responses might help calm her. Playing, talking, singing, rocking, and walking may work. Simply repositioning her or letting her fuss it out may also be a successful strategy. You might also find that while a particular response works momentarily, she'll soon become even fussier and demand more attention. This cycle may continue until you either let her cry a few minutes or distract her with something different—for example, taking her outside.

As trying as these spells can be, you'll both learn about each other because of them. You'll discover how your baby likes to be rocked, what funny faces or voices she most enjoys, and what she most likes to look at. She'll find out what to do to elicit your response, how hard you'll try to please her, and where your limits lie.

Crying spells

There may be times, however, when you feel frustrated, even angry, when your baby will not stop crying. The best thing to do here is gently place her back in the crib and take a little break for yourself.

It is most important you resist any temptation to shake or strike your baby in any way. The danger from shaking your baby is great and can cause serious damage to your baby. "Shaken baby (/English/safety-prevention/at-home/Pages/Abusive-Head-Trauma-Shaken-Baby-Syndrome.aspx)" situations are one form of child abuse that continues to be a problem around the world.

If crying difficulties remain an issue, discuss this in detail with your pediatrician, who will give you other ideas for how to get through these episodes. Be sure you share these new techniques for quieting your infant with your childcare provider, who may feel similar frustrations with inconsolable crying.

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