



# Building a healthy relationship with your baby and toddler

## 1. Spend time face-to-face with your baby.

Take time each day to cuddle your baby. Play with your baby. Hold your baby close to you so you have lots of face-to-face contact. Face-to-face contact and a gentle loving touch will help your baby connect with you and grow in healthy ways.

Spend time watching what your baby does. Respond to your baby's facial expressions and sounds and try imitating them. Talk to your baby - research shows that the more words a baby hears in a day, the better they learn. This back and forth activity with your baby also helps your baby grow and develop.

## 2. Observe your baby.

Watch and listen to your baby to learn what your baby wants or needs. Here are some cues to help you know what your baby is "saying" to you:

*Turns away, does not want eye contact*

***"I need rest."***

*Frowns, starts to cry, pulls away*

***"I am upset, lonely, sick, or hurt."***

*Cries, has wide-open eyes, stiffens body, arches spine or turns away from you*

***"I am in distress, upset or afraid."***

*Reaches for you, follows you (if a walking toddler), face has a sad look —maybe a trembling lip*

***"I need you."***

*Smiles, giggles, gazes at you, reaches for you, makes cooing sounds*

***"I like that!"***

## *If your child is a toddler...*

***Did you know you are the best toy in the room?*** Children do not need costly or fancy toys to grow, learn and develop. What they need most is someone they can count on to talk to them, notice what they do and comfort them when they feel upset. They need playful chances to learn about and explore the world.

***Do you talk out loud about different feelings?*** By giving a name to feelings and talking about your child's emotions, you can help your child understand feelings like happy, sad, excited, and angry. Children who are able to express their feelings and know they will get a soothing response are less likely to act out to make their needs known.



See [www.healthyfamiliesbc.ca/parenting](http://www.healthyfamiliesbc.ca/parenting) to learn more about ways to help your child adjust to their emotions.

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## 3. Notice the cues that say distress.

You cannot spoil a baby with too much attention. Do not ignore distress cues that tell you when your baby is hurt, sick, afraid, or lonely.

Researchers tell us that babies who are in distress and whose parents respond promptly cry less after the first year. By the time babies are beyond 4 months old, they can handle short periods of mild distress. Giving them a chance to calm themselves down helps them learn new skills and to sleep longer periods at night. Young children need help from adults to manage distress but they also need chances to learn to calm themselves when they are angry and frustrated.

## 4. Delight in your baby.

Help your baby explore and play by finding ways to share new things. Stacking cups or playing with blocks or stuffed toys are all more fun when shared. Welcome your baby when he or she needs to cuddle or comes to you for comfort.

## 5. Get down on the floor with your baby.

A thinking baby is an active baby. Every baby needs “tummy time” on a mat or blanket set on the floor. This is a time when your baby will exercise muscles or discover new ways to move. Spend time watching what your baby does. Respond to your baby’s cues. If your child has not done “tummy time” before, begin slowly, for very short periods of time.



## Tips for all parents...

**Forgive yourself and your partner for mistakes.** Nobody is perfect. Being a perfect parent is impossible. It is not even a good idea to try to be perfect as a parent!

**Take care of yourself.** Parents who are feeling lonely, afraid, sad, or worried will find it hard to respond to their baby’s needs. If you need help with any of these feelings, talk to your public health nurse or family doctor.

**Always use gentle hands and a kind voice.** At the heart of a healthy relationship between a parent and child is a feeling of trust. You can gain this trust by being a steady source of comfort so your child feels safe and secure.

**For further information**, please visit [www.healthyfamiliesbc.ca/parenting](http://www.healthyfamiliesbc.ca/parenting) or call HealthLinkBC at 8-1-1. To download the most up-to-date version of this pamphlet, please visit [www.childhealthbc.ca/bchcda](http://www.childhealthbc.ca/bchcda).

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Appleyard K, Berlin LJ. *Supporting Healthy Relationships Between Young Children and Their Parents: Lessons from Attachment Theory and Research*. Durham, North Carolina: Center for Child and Family Policy; 2007. <https://childandfamilypolicy.duke.edu/pdfs/pubpres/SupportingHealthyRelationships.pdf>  
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Cooper M, Hoffman K, Marvin R, Powell B. *Building a Secure Attachment with Your Baby*. 2000. [www.circleofsecurity.net](http://www.circleofsecurity.net). Accessed January 10, 2012.

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