

Connecting with Your Baby

As you prepared for your baby's arrival, it's likely that you heard the word 'attachment' a few times. *Attachment* refers to the relationship that infants develop with their caregivers in the first years of life. Having stable and secure attachment relationships sets the stage for relationships later in life. Having good attachment relationships helps the brain develop, and also affects personality in a positive way. Creating a secure attachment bond really does help your baby grow!

Most new parents are excited to start bonding with their babies. After waiting nine months – or maybe even much longer if you've adopted – you are sure to be very eager to get to know this little person who has entered your life. But how, exactly, do you bond with a new baby? While building an attachment relationship seems to come naturally to some parents, for many of us it can be more of a learned skill. Babies might seem fragile—and if your baby has any special medical needs, if your delivery was difficult, or if this is your first experience with a new baby, you might be a little overwhelmed. First time fathers also often wonder how to connect with a very young infant.

Before babies are born, they get to know the rhythms and sounds of their mother's body. They also become familiar with the voices they hear. The time right after your baby is born is an important time to start bonding -- babies are usually placed directly on mom's chest after birth to have some skin-to-skin contact and to allow breastfeeding to begin. However, if your baby needs to be in an intensive care unit, or is separated from you after birth, don't dismay – research shows that babies can very successfully bond with their caregivers later, which is also good to remember if you are adopting.

Touch is one of the first ways that your baby gets to know you. Through research, we also know that touch helps a baby's brain grow and develop connections. Holding your baby creates a sense of security and safety, and touch and cuddling are great ways to spend time with your baby. Studies have shown the benefits of [infant massage](#), and some regions offer classes, which are a good idea for anyone considering the practice.

If you are considering whether to use a front baby carrier, be mindful that some of these products have been recalled—so check [Health Canada's Recalls and Safety Alerts](#) for your model. Although front carriers can allow for connecting with your baby, it is important to use them safely and correctly. [Health Canada states that babies in carriers should be 'visible and kissable'](#), meaning that the baby's face should not be pressed into either your body or the fabric of the sling.

Feeding time is another great opportunity to bond with your baby. Whether you choose to breastfeed or to formula feed, you can take the opportunity to have skin-to-skin contact with your baby. Cuddle with your baby and talk to him or her during the feeding. If you are bottle feeding, never prop up the bottle – always hold it, until your baby is old

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enough to do the holding him or herself. Feeding time is also a great time to get to know your baby's cues for hunger and fullness. Babies know when they are hungry and will intuitively stop eating when they are full. You might notice your baby spitting out the nipple or turning his or her head away – this is a cue that your baby has had enough. If you are doing some bottle feeding, whether with formula or expressed breast milk, this can also be a nice opportunity for the parent who is not breastfeeding to engage with the baby.

It is important that your baby sees that you not only enjoy him but that you delight in him! This helps your baby feel safe and loved, and helps develop self-esteem. It also helps your baby's brain grow. Playtime is a wonderful opportunity to enjoy your baby. And, because babies sleep on their backs, [it is important that they spend time during the day in other positions](#). Tummy time is a great way to play, and also helps to avoid your baby developing a flat spot on the back of his or her head.

While there are some great toys available, you need not purchase the most expensive items on the market. Very often, babies are happiest playing with simple, colourful everyday items from your home, provided they have no small parts that could be swallowed. Things such as plastic measuring cups and bright washcloths can be things your baby will enjoy exploring!

To your baby, you are the most important and most exciting part of play. Smile at your baby often, tell your baby a story, make faces or play peek-a-boo. As you play, notice your baby's cues and attention span. If he or she goes from actively watching to blinking sleepily or fussing, it might be time for a break. Just as they know they've had enough to eat, babies also know when they've had enough playtime. They might start to avert their eyes or look around the room. Follow your baby's lead rather than trying too eagerly to re-engage as this can cause your baby to feel over-stimulated and lead to crying.

Even though your baby is not ready to have a conversation with you, he or she enjoys the sound of your voice. You might notice your baby imitating you very early on--even by simply moving his mouth. When you speak to your baby or when your baby hears you having a conversation with someone, he or she learns about language and gets to know the sound of the voices and who they belong to. Allow your baby to hear you use different tones and pitches in your voice. As you go through your day-to-day activities, talk to your baby—tell your baby what you are doing and why you are doing it. You can even do this during something as routine as a diaper change! Notice how your baby watches your face and enjoys the sound of your voice.

Singing to your baby is another great way to bond and it can help your baby's brain develop. Babies don't care if you are tone-deaf – they just enjoy listening. And while

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nursery rhymes are great, your baby will be just as happy hearing 'Top 40' pop songs or classic rock as he would hearing Mother Goose. That said, there are many great parent and baby groups in Manitoba such as [Healthy Baby Community Support Programs](#) where you can learn about your baby's development and connect with other parents. There are also many great online websites you can access to learn more about nursery rhymes and songs. You can read more [about the benefits of nursery rhymes here](#), or [brush up on your repertoire at this link from the BBC](#).

If you have any concerns about how your baby is responding to you or if you feel that you are having a hard time connecting with your baby, speak with your public health nurse or family doctor. Check below for more great links and information about connecting with your baby. Have fun and enjoy connecting with your baby!

[KidsHealth: Bonding With Your Baby](#) – KidsHealth discusses creating and maintaining the attachment relationship between parent and infant.

[The Attachment Association of Canada](#) – This national organization provides information and education about attachment and bonding to parents and professionals.

[Healthy Baby, Healthy Brain](#) – This health promotion website from Ontario offers resources and information including how love, health, and play help the growth of children's brains.

[Infant Mental Health Promotion](#) – Learn more about how play and socialization helps your child grow and develop.