

Tips to Grow By™

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It's Not Just Baby Talk

Your baby's personality begins to become evident as he becomes more active and alert. During this period you will be able to engage your baby in two-way "conversations" — exchanging smiles and oohs and aahs.

How babies communicate

Crying continues to be a baby's primary means of communication for many months. Aside from letting parents know that they need something, they might cry when overwhelmed by all of the sights and sounds of the world.

Sometimes babies cry for no apparent reason. As long as your baby isn't sick or hurt, don't get too upset if he cries and you aren't able to console him.

Your baby will respond to the sound of your voice by becoming quiet, smiling or getting excited and moving his arms and legs. He will begin smiling regularly at mom and dad, but may need some time to warm up to others.

Babies now discover their ability to vocalize: Soon you'll have a cooing and gurgling machine! Some babies begin to make some vowel sounds, like "ah-ah" or "ooh-ooh," at about 2 months. He may even mimic your facial expressions.

Engaging your baby

Your baby loves to hear your voice, so talk, babble, sing and coo away during these first few months. Respond enthusiastically to his sounds and smiles. Tell him what he is looking at or doing and what you are doing. Name familiar objects as you touch them or bring them to him.

Take special advantage of your baby's own "talking" by having a "conversation." If you hear him make a sound, repeat it and wait for him to make another. You are teaching him valuable lessons about tone, pacing and taking turns when talking to someone else. This also sends the message that he's important enough to listen to.

Young babies respond best to the female voice — the one historically associated with comfort and food. That's why most people will raise the pitch of their voices and exaggerate

their speech when talking to babies. This is fine — studies have shown that "baby talk" doesn't delay the development of speech — but mix in some regular adult words and tone. It may seem early, but you're setting the stage for your baby's first word.

Sometimes babies aren't in the mood to talk or vocalize — even babies need their space and a break from all the stimulation in the world. Babies might turn away, close their eyes, or become fussy or irritable. If this happens, let your little one be, or just try cuddling.

It's common for babies to have a fussy period about the same time every day, generally between early evening and midnight. Though all babies cry and show some fussiness, when an otherwise healthy infant cries for more than 3 hours per day, more than three days per week for at least three weeks, it is a condition known as colic. This can be upsetting, but the good news is that it's short-lived — most babies outgrow it at around 3 months of age.

Try to soothe your baby. Some babies are comforted by motion, such as rocking or being walked back and forth across the room, while others respond to sounds, like soft music or the hum of a vacuum cleaner. It may take some time to find out what best comforts your baby during these stressful periods.

What to expect

Babies usually reach these communication milestones during their first three months:

- pay attention to faces and surroundings
- smile at the sound of a parent's voice
- smiles with social contact
- coos and may start to babble
- imitates some sounds and facial expressions

Keep in mind that babies communicate at different rates, just as they mature physically at different rates. There is usually no cause for concern, but talk to your doctor if your baby misses any of these milestones.

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