

Hand-out for Parents

INTERACTING WITH BABIES

BABIES' MENTAL and emotional health, and their brain power, are built through interaction with the important adults in their lives. Here are some tips about how to interact with a baby.

Accept your baby for who she is. All babies are different. Some cry a lot. Some don't. Some sleep a lot. Others don't. Do your best to understand your baby and let her know that you love her as she is.

Look into your baby's eyes with love. Your eyes are the baby's window to your heart and mind. Babies need to repeatedly see the love in our eyes.

Be a mirror. Pay attention to your baby's expressions and moods. Be a mirror. If your baby is smiling, smile back. If he is sad, show your sympathy.

Speak to your baby in a gentle but interesting voice. Hearing the sounds of their language over and over again helps baby brains get ready to learn to talk and read later on! Researchers call the way that mothers often speak to babies "motherese." It's a little higher in pitch, more exaggerated in tone, but still gentle. Mothers and dads in many cultures speak to their babies this way, because it captures babies' interest and attention.

Soothe her when she cries. Babies feel strong emotions easily and they can't manage them on their own. So they depend on their parents to help feel them better when they are upset. The repeated experience of being soothed helps "program" babies' stress response systems, so they will be better able to manage and recover from stress when they grow up.

Play, baby-style. Little babies don't play in the same way as older kids. But you *can* play with them. Babies can "teach us" how to play with them, if we base what we do on their responses and signs of interest. Follow your baby's lead, or try something – make a silly sound or show her a toy. Wait to see if he is interested – his eyes will tell you. If he responds, you know you are on the right track. It's important to stop while it's still fun. Babies have short attention spans. If your baby is turning away, frowning, or fussing, that shows he's getting tired or losing interest.



Tip: Singing is another great way to capture a baby's interest!

Tip: Physical contact helps babies feel safe and loved. It even helps regulate their body temperature and breathing. Rock your baby in a chair, or carry him in your arms or in a "wearable" baby carrier.

Tip: Traditional baby games like "Peekaboo" and "This little pig went to market" are great places to start.