



Wee Learn



Wee Beginners (0-18 months): How Is Your Infant Learning?

Babies do more than eat and sleep. They are soaking up knowledge. Babies see and hear everything you are doing. Therefore, there are many things you can do to help your child learn and grow.

Babies learn through sensory experiences (see, touch, smell, listen), talking, repetition, and play. These experiences help them learn to sit, crawl, walk, talk, eat, problem-solve, interact with others, and more.

Sensory. Give your baby every opportunity to see, touch, smell, and hear what's going on in their environment.

- Show your baby pictures, colors, and even words. These images will leave a lasting mark in their brains. This can come from books, room decorations, fabrics, etc. You can develop your baby's early language by showing them sign language. Pick a few simple signs for concepts, such as "more" and "please." Model the gesture with the word. For example, if your baby wants another spoonful of baby food, you sign and say the word "more." Then you give your baby another bite.
- It is important teaching your baby concepts, such as hard, soft, rough, smooth, hot, cold, and more. Keep the experience safe. Don't allow your child to put something unsafe in his or her mouth. Don't allow your child to burn his or herself by touching something hot.
- We associate a lot with our sense of smell. There are plenty of opportunities to let your child smell his or her food. Watch your child's face when he or she smells an orange, a lemon, or cinnamon.
- Sounds, such as sirens, singing, music, bells, and more will provide learning opportunities for your baby. This will teach your baby how to react with emotion, and in other instances, it will convey a sense of calm (such as when a mom or dad sings to a crying baby).

Talk. With every experience, remember to match the word with the experience. For example, if you are looking at colors, say the color. If you are touching something cold, say the word cold. Also, tell your baby what you are doing. If you are cooking dinner, tell him or her you are "cutting the carrots." When you bathe your baby, tell him or her that you are washing their arm. Sometimes it's helpful to make up little songs to describe what you are doing. Songs also are helpful for routine tasks. For example, make up a song for cleaning up toys. Sing it every time you clean up (even if your baby is too young to help). Your baby will associate routines tasks with that song. It will teach responsibility.

Play. There's no better way to teach your baby new things than through play. Here are some ways to work play into your baby's routine:

- Use "tummy time" as an opportunity to look at picture cards or touch different toys and objects. Tummy time is a time when your child is awake and playing on the floor with supervision.
- Sing as often as you can. This will help with your baby's language and vocabulary.
- Read a book and talk about the pictures you see.

Repetition. Repetition is an important part of learning. Very few people learn new things by doing it just once. It takes practice to learn something new. For example, if you are teaching your baby to say "mama," say it every time you talk about yourself. Say daddy when you point to pictures of dad.

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