

Interacting with your Baby:

Play, Reading, and Screen Time

Being active is important for everyone, even babies. Getting down on the floor to move helps your baby become strong, learn, and explore. Playpens, swings, and infant seats are ok to use sometimes, but not too often. Being active helps kids learn basic motor skills, which will help them all through their life.

Play time is a great time to help a baby move around and play with toys. Almost anything that is eye-catching or makes noise is perfect, like mirrors and bright toys to hold. Games such as pattycake, peek-a-boo, and “how big is the baby?” all help active movement. Tummy time is also great—just put your baby on his tummy when awake while you watch.

TV and smartphones can get in the way of kids playing and interacting with people, which helps with learning and healthy development. If your baby is fussy, instead of putting her in front of the TV, give her safe toys to hold and put in her mouth. Make sure she is getting routine naps and playtimes. Toys such as shape sorters, stacking blocks, and baby-safe puzzles are great for a child’s fine motor, cognitive, and perceptual skills.

“Screen time” means watching TV, using a computer, or playing video games. During screen time, you are sitting down and not moving your body very much. Children under age two should have **no** screen time. Limit screen time to one to two hours a day for children over age two.



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Here are some tips to help change your family's screen time habits:

- **Set a good example** by limiting your own TV viewing. Keep TVs out of bedrooms and turn the TV off during meals.



- **Watch with your child.** Try to watch programs together—and talk about what you see, such as family values, violence, or drugs.



- **Support active screen time.** Have your child stretch or do yoga while watching TV. See who can do the most jumping jacks during a commercial break.

- **Offer fun alternatives to TV.** If your kids want to watch TV, suggest that you all play a game, play outside, read, work on crafts, or dance to music.



Make sure all toys and parts are larger than your child's mouth so he does not choke. Buttons, batteries, magnets, and un-inflated balloons are harmful if swallowed. Call your child's doctor or 911 right away if your child swallows one of these items. Also watch out for pull toys with long strings, as a baby could get his neck caught in it.

SOURCES:

- **CDC website with many great topics and other resources:** www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/positiveparenting/infants.html
- www.aap.org
- www.healthychildren.org
- www.zerotothree.org
- www.brighthorizons.com

Talk and Read to Your Baby Every Day!

It's never too early to start reading to your baby. Pediatricians suggest reading aloud to your child every day.

The ways you read, talk, sing, and play with your baby will help his or her language development. The more words your child hears, the easier it will be for your child to learn to read.

For example, as babies see a picture of a red bird in the book and you name the bird, they start to make the link between what you say and the picture of the red bird. The more you read that book, the stronger the link. If your child wants to stop and hold or chew on the book, that is okay. Talk with your baby in the language that is most comfortable to you. It is good for children to hear language spoken fluently with as many words as possible.

Singing with children is another way to share language. You may sing songs and say rhymes that you know from your childhood. Sing songs to your baby in the language that is most comfortable to you. Singing is also a good way to support later reading. For example, in many songs, there is a different note for each syllable, so children are hearing words being broken down into parts. This helps to grow babies' vocabulary.

Babies use play to learn about their world. As your baby is playing with toys, describe what your baby is doing. By talking about things like colors and shapes, you are helping your child with language and laying a strong base for learning. Just as they explore rattles, blocks, and stuffed animals, they can also explore books. As your baby grows and develops, you can read longer books, sing songs together, and have longer and richer talks. Have fun!

- **U.S. Dept. of Education:** www2.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/reader/part5.html#bt
- www.ala.org/alsc/issuesadv/borntoread/resources
- www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-living/childrens-health/in-depth/children-and-tv/art-20047952?pg=2
- www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/patientinstructions/000355.htm
- www.familydoctor.org

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