

Everyday Developmental Moments

Singing, dancing, exercising and simply talking...those are special moments between parents/caregivers and babies. Such simple activities that can be folded into everyday activities hold surprising power:

Attachment and Bonding

True bonding does not happen in one glorious moment. Instead, it is built over time in everyday interactions where parents and babies slowly get to know each other and learn to trust and love.

- Use baby's name often—put baby's name in old familiar songs “Mallory had a little lamb...”
- Do a mini massage rubbing baby's arms, legs, tummy before bedtime.
- Gaze into baby's eyes and hum a quiet song while nursing/feeding.
- As you are dressing baby, describe what you have planned for the day.
- What is a favorite song from your own childhood? Share that with baby.

Boosting Baby's Brain

Baby's brain develops millions upon millions of **neural pathways** in the first years of life. Those pathways are built best during the moments when baby feels a loving connection with parents and other important people in this life. Baby can then exercise the **prefrontal cortex**, the part of the brain that is in charge of learning, attention span, short-term memory, impulse control, and judgment.

- Sportscast your daily activities—“I'm putting groceries on the shelf. Here's a can of beans, here's some macaroni. It won't be long before you can eat macaroni, too.”
- Sportscast baby's activities—“You found your hand! Into your mouth it goes!”
- Use “parentese” a voice with higher pitch and great expression to engage baby in listening.
- Tired of talking? Read a child's picture book. Don't worry about the story—just point out pictures and name objects, colors, etc.
- Needing to answer an email or wanting to flip through a magazine (or read one of those parenting books piled by your bed)/ Read outloud with “parentese”
- Time to cook dinner? Keep a bowl of plastic cooking utensils ready to hand to baby to explore one at a time (measuring cups or spoons, different colors and sizes of plastic lids, wooden spoon, etc.)

Exercising Motor Control

Until baby develops control we help move baby's body and provide opportunities to stretch, reach and eventually grab, roll and sit.

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While baby plays on the floor, practice cross body movements as you move a little leg up toward the opposite shoulder and back.

Lie on the floor and do tummy time together. Your presence will make tummy time more bearable! Dangle a favorite toy within eyesight...and later up a little higher to encourage the head to rise.

Play airplane and fly baby from one room to the next as you put away laundry.

Do a few crunches of your own as you raise baby up and down on your “elevator.”

Encouraging Communication

Answering baby’s coos models the back and forth that will eventually become mutual conversation. At first the words are just sounds, but soon they are connected to meaning as baby’s blossoming vocabulary reflects the words heard over and over again.

Begin diaper changing with the hand sign “change” so baby learns what is coming next.

Then name body parts--head shoulders knees and toes. In a silly mood? Include chubby thighs and elbows too! If you use correct anatomical words now you will be very comfortable using them with your preschooler who will soon be asking.

Say what you see—as you walk baby toward naptime, describe the things you see along the way—“Night night picture on the wall, night night lamp on a table...”

Emotional Regulation

Your engaged, responsive presence leads to assurance that emotions can be expressed and will be responded to.

Before you move baby’s body, give a little respectful verbal warning to make sure baby is ready—“Ready to exercise with me? “Time to help cook dinner.” “ Here we go”

Baby will respond to your mood, so check your own regulation before you try to interact.

Reflect baby’s mood before trying to change it—“That loud noise startled you! It went away and I am here with you.”

Put on a little music and sway together suggling.

When an interaction is ending, say “goodbye” to ease the transition—“Groceries are all put away- -good bye, groceries.” “Looks like you’ve had enough exercising.

All done—up you go.” If you are using baby sign, give the sign and say, “All done.”

Sensory Integration

Being exposed to sights, sounds, smells and touch enriches baby’s experience of the world.

Change your voice—squeaky and high, low and deep.

Tap on baby’s foot to emphasize key words or rhythms in songs you sing.

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Gently smooth a stuffy over baby's skin while sitting in the car seat waiting to go.

Burnt the toast? Talk about the smell. Let baby listen as you scape away the burnt part!

Noisy vacuum a little scary? Turn it on and quickly off a few times together.

Stop in the doorway and flip the light switch on and off, giving baby time to notice the difference,

Sense of humor and fun

The first belly laugh will come from repeated, silly interactions with YOU!

Revive the classic--make raspberries on baby's belly!

Make up nonsense words and pair them with funny facial expressions.

While you are emptying the dishwasher, peek out from behind an open kitchen cabinet door.

Surprise baby by wearing a silly hat or glasses during diaper change.

Don't consider this another thing you have to keep track of or accomplish. Just build these kinds of interactions into what you are already doing.

Repetition is important for babies, so don't get hung up on getting "creative." All those brain synapses need to be stimulated over and over to become hardwired. You can adjust activities to fit your baby's current development...take a moment to observe and appreciate what baby might, or might not, respond to. You'll notice how the activities can naturally be expanded as baby grows and changes.

Developmental moments are so powerful that they needn't or shouldn't be practiced continually, all day! Babies also need time to themselves to process their world and, as they get older, learn to be by themselves without adult interaction.

Have fun! Your baby will have more fun if you're having fun. Your baby will feel more connected if you feel connected. You may feel silly...but only baby is listening and baby thinks you are the most wonderful person in the world.

More Ideas:

For happy naked time:

Round and round the garden goes the teddy bear. One step two steps tickle you under there!

Round and round the cabbage patch goes the little bunny. One hop, two hops, tickle you on your tummy!

(With your fingers make circles on the tummy, then step them up to under the chin or tickle them on the tummy)

For wiggling dressing:

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Baby put your pants on, pants on, pants on

Baby put your pants on, 1 2 3!

Baby put your shirt on.....etc. end with: now we're done!

For when YOU want a little exercise:

Let's go riding on an elevator

First floor, second floor, third floor

Push the button,

Down down down down.

(Can be done lying on your back to work your arms or standing to work your arms and thighs)

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