



ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime



Before Baby's First Word: Building Blocks for Language

Talking, Reading, and Singing: A Guide for Your Baby's First Year

Your baby's brain is amazing! It is growing and making connections right from the start. The more you connect with your child, the more connections they make in their brain. How can you help build your baby's brain? By talking, reading and singing together! The great news is you don't need any special toys to do this. Your face, your voice, and your touch are all you need. Babies learn from your back-and-forth interactions every day.

Things to know

Talk with baby:

Babies love hearing your voice. Talk about anything — your day, the weather, how cute your baby is! Let your face show when you're happy, excited, or have a question. Pause and give your baby a turn to respond. They may smile, laugh, or make a sound. These "conversations" help babies learn language best.

Use your native language:

Speak the language you know best. Hearing two or more languages is okay. It does not cause long-term language delay. Your baby can learn two languages (or more) right from the start!

"Sportscasting":

Talk about what you are doing. Describe each step as it happens. "Now I am putting on your sock. Up goes your foot!" Hearing lots of words builds vocabulary over time.

Add on:

Watch and listen to your baby. Repeat their sounds and add a word. If they say "Da," say, "Da, da, Daddy!" This back-and-forth teaches new words.

Birth to 3 months: listening and cooing

Talking: Sing and talk every day. Your baby first heard your voice in the womb. Your voice is their favorite! Hearing you talk helps them feel calm and happy.

Environment: Plan quiet time (5–10 minutes) each day to focus on your baby. Turn off the TV. Silence your phone for a few minutes. Make this a special playtime for the two of you to talk, play, and move.

Share stories: It's true that your newborn doesn't understand stories yet. But, they do understand how good it feels to hear your voice and sit on your lap! Books can make daily routines like bedtime and waiting times easier for everyone. They also help your child build a big vocabulary later on.

Smiling: Around 2 months old, babies learn to smile when they are happy. It's great to read, talk, and sing to them even before they can smile back. But when they start smiling — it's just way more fun!



ZERO to THREE
Early connections last a lifetime



3 to 6 months: making sounds

Talking: Hold your baby close. Make eye contact and smile. Copy the sounds they make. If they copy you, repeat the word again.

Routines: Use daily tasks to teach words. Talk during bath time and diaper changes. Talk while getting dressed. Hearing words connected to actions helps babies learn.

Reading: Share board books and soft books. Bath books are great, too. Your baby may want to chew the book. That's okay! Your baby may not sit still for a whole story. That's okay, too! They are hearing lots of language and learning that books are fun.

6 to 9 months: encouraging babbling

Talking: Take turns making sounds. When your baby babbles, answer back. Play Peek-a-Boo and Pat-a-Cake. Hand them a toy and describe it. "The teddy bear feels soft." Let them look in a mirror. Ask, "Who is that?"

Reading: Choose short stories with bright pictures. Babies may look, touch, or chew books. This is normal at this age. Take a break if they look away or cry.

9 to 12 months: understanding and first words

Talking: Your baby will use their body to talk. They may lift their arms to say "up." They may bang the table to say "more!" Name their actions with short phrases. Say, "All done?" Many babies say "mama" or "dada" around their first birthday. Teach simple gestures like waving "bye-bye." Say the word as they wave.

Reading: Choose board books with simple stories. Look for rhymes and repeated phrases. Around 12 months, ask easy questions about the story. "Where is the moon?" Watch if your baby points.

Talk, sing, and read throughout the day. Try it during meals and diaper changes. Talk in the car or before bed. Each moment builds connection. It also builds strong language and reading skills later on.

Have more questions?

Talk to your baby's healthcare provider or one of the professionals supporting your family.

©2026 by the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. All rights reserved.

Receive messages like this on your phone

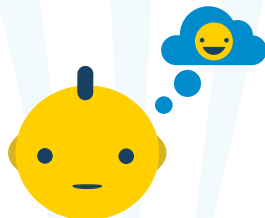
Text **SPARKS**
to **274 448**

You Can Help My Brain Grow from Day One!

8 Things Your Newborn Wants You to Know



All my experiences change the “foundation” of my brain and can help or hurt its growth.



It takes me 4 to 8 weeks to learn how to smile. I’m not unhappy. I just can’t control my face muscles yet. But just wait, my smile will be amazing!



I like it when we take turns “talking” back-and-forth, like a game of catch. I may turn away for a break, but I’ll come back.



I take it all in when you look, smile, or yell at me. My brain never turns off, even when I’m asleep or it seems like I’m not paying attention.



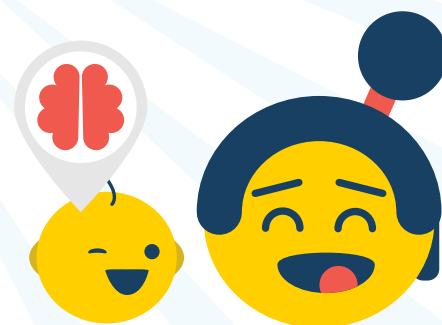
Don’t worry—you can’t spoil me! I can’t soothe myself yet, but soothing me now teaches me how to soothe myself.



Anger, violence, and too much stress aren’t good for me. Even though I’m a baby, I will be changed by these experiences.



It’s hard to soothe me if you are stressed out. If you are upset, please put me down and take a short break.



I learn from being with people, not screens. Please turn off the TV and put your phone away sometimes.