A Parent's Love & A Baby's Brain

You have just brought your new baby home from the hospital and are wondering how you will be able to do the many things you’ve heard that “good moms or good dads do” for their newborns. You are physically exhausted, excited and scared at the prospect of shaping the life of this new human. You will probably hear every sound your child makes for the first few weeks and worryingly check on him when he is sleeping because he is not making sounds. You’ve stressed over the right type of diapers to buy, the type of bedding, crib and clothes to buy, the best car seat, the process of breastfeeding or bottle feeding and what you need to do to keep him safe and healthy. You are all set to be a “good mom” or “good dad” but it is so overwhelming!

You do all of these things because you love your child. Scientists tell us that because you love your child and have the instinct to nurture your child, you are already a “good parent.”

Did you know that you can actually affect your child’s brain development by nurturing him and showing your love for him?

Scientists at major research centers tell us that brain imaging shows how a parent’s love and nurturing can physically affect a child’s brain. Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, Mo. and the University of Washington’s I-LABS Brain Research Center in Seattle, Washington have produced brain images that show the growth of babies’ hippocampus region of the brain, the brain region important for learning, memory and stress responses, is greater in babies of nurturing moms. The hippocampus region of the brain can change in response to nurturing parenting.
Watching Your Baby Grow

As a new parent, you may feel anxious about caring for a newborn and may need help from family members, friends, and others to better understand the needs of a newborn. Many organizations and agencies have wonderful resources and helpful information you can use to know what to expect in your new baby's growth and development.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offer new parents an app that allows you to learn about your baby’s developmental milestones and keep track of them as he grows. The Milestone Tracker App identifies developmental milestones in how your child moves, plays, speaks, acts, and learns. The app has photos and videos to illustrate each milestone and allows you to keep track of the milestones your child has mastered and the ones he is still attempting to master. The app gives you illustrated checklists, tips for encouraging his development and alerts you about areas of concern to discuss with your child’s pediatrician. You can download a summary of your child’s milestones to keep or share with his child care provider. When you take your child for his well-child visits, you will be able to discuss his progress on the milestones with the doctor, physician’s assistant or nurse. You can also download a Baby Games Calendar from Pathways with activities to do each day with your baby to support his development.

New parents need to know what to expect and look for as their new baby grows. Newsletters about your child’s growth and development can help you understand how he is developing and know what to expect. As your baby grows from a newborn to a toddler, you will be amazed how quickly he learns and grows.

Just in Time Parenting is a parenting newsletter delivered by email monthly and is specific to your child’s age and needs. This free newsletter is designed so information relevant to families is automatically delivered just in time to observe and interact with your child to support his current level of development. It is available for expectant parents during the first, second and third trimesters of pregnancy. After your child is born, you will receive a newborn issue and then a monthly issue from month 1 through month 12. For ages 2 years to 5 years, the newsletter is sent to you bi-monthly.

Try CDC’s FREE Milestone Tracker app today... Because milestones matter

- Milestone checklists for 2 months to 5 years
- Summary of your child’s milestones
- Activities to help your child’s development
- Tips for what to do if you have concerns
- Appointment reminders

Now available in Spanish!

From Baby to Big Kid Parent Newsletter is another free, monthly e-newsletter from Zero to Three that will give you information about child development, parent-child play activities, research on child development and articles on common child-rearing issues and challenges for children from birth to three years old. It is has articles on play, bonding and attachment and parents’ frequently asked questions.

June 1 Flip A Coin Day ★ June 1 National Trails Day ★ June 4 National Hug Your Cat Day ★ June 5 World Environment Day ★ National Yo-Yo Day ★ June 7 National Ice Cream Day ★ June 7 National Doughnut Day ★ June 8 Best Friends Day ★ June 8 World Ocean Day ★ June 10 Iced Tea Day ★ June 12 National Peanut Butter Cookie Day ★ June 12 Red Rose Day ★ June 14 National Flag Day ★ June 15 National Nature Photography Day ★ June 16 Father’s Day ★ June 17 Eat Your Vegetables Day ★ June 18 International Picnic Day ★ June 20 Ice Cream Soda Day ★ June 21 International Yoga Day ★ June 21 National Selfie Day ★ June 21 Take A Road Trip Day ★ June 23 National Pink Day ★ June 27 Sunglasses Day ★ June 29 Camera Day ★ June 29 Hug Holiday ★ June 30 Meteor Day
Babies Sleeping Safely

A sleeping baby seems so peaceful and content. It is a beautiful sight for overtired, sleep-deprived parents and offers them a break from worrying about their new baby. Your baby may be in a safe place while sleeping if you know about safe sleep practices for babies and have created a safe sleep environment in your home. Research on Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) has led to specific guidelines for parents to make a safe sleeping environment for their babies.

Before bringing your newborn home from the hospital, have a safe crib or cradle ready for her, whether in your room or in a separate room. Do not allow your newborn to sleep in the bed with you. Babies can die when adults fall asleep and roll over on them or the baby can get tangled in the blankets or sheets and suffocate. If you bring your baby to bed with you to feed or comfort her, remove all soft items and bedding from the area and place the baby back in her sleeping area afterwards.

Always place your baby on her back to sleep at night and for naps during the day. Her sleep area should have a firm, flat mattress covered by a fitted sheet with no other bedding or soft items such as crib bumpers, stuffed animals or blankets in her sleep area. Dress her in sleep clothing such as a wearable blanket to keep her warm.

Make sure the clothing does not cover her face or head while she is sleeping. Make sure she is dressed appropriately for the temperature in the room and is not sweating or chilly. Do not put your baby down to sleep swaddled because she may roll over onto her stomach before you realize she is able to roll over.

New research has shown the use of pacifiers can reduce the risk of SIDS in all babies, breastfed or bottle-fed. Consider offering your baby a pacifier for naps and nighttime sleep. If you are not breastfeeding, offer her a pacifier as soon as you want. If you are breastfeeding you may want to wait three or four weeks until your baby’s nursing routine is established.

Never force her to use the pacifier if she objects. Limit the time she spends sitting in car seats, baby swings and baby carriers and change the direction you lay her down to sleep in her crib from week to week. This prevents flat spots on the back of her head. Following the recommended practices of safe sleep will give you peace of mind and help your baby sleep safely.

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Responding to your baby’s coos, cries and facial expressions help to form parent – child attachment behaviors that shape your child’s social and emotional development and assure you that your child is safe. Being attuned to your baby’s needs (Is he hungry? Does he need a diaper change? Is he too cool or too hot? Does he need to be cuddled and talked to?) makes life happier for both of you and helps his brain development at the same time. If you respond sensitively to your child and try to find out what is making him cry as quickly and as often as possible, you will develop a sensitivity to his needs that will comfort both of you. Before he can talk, the response time and your ability to sense his needs makes it easier for you to anticipate his needs and results in less crying. This makes both of you much happier and relaxed.

Relax and enjoy this new addition to your family. Realize that by loving him and responding to his needs you are a “good parent.” This child will enrich your life as much as you are enriching his. Get ready for a wonderful journey together.
Feeding Your Baby

As a new parent, one of the first decisions you will need to make is how to feed your baby. New parents need reliable information when making this decision and you should talk with your health care provider and make a decision that is best for you and your child. Some mothers breastfeed their baby while other others choose to bottle feed using breast milk or infant formula. Some mothers are unable to breast feed due to a medical situation, comfort level or lifestyle or may be a foster or adoptive parent. For parents who don’t breastfeed, choosing an infant formula for their baby is a healthy alternative.

Breastfeeding is a natural way to feed your baby that has no cost and may lower your risk for type 2 diabetes, certain types of breast cancer and ovarian cancer. Breastfeeding may also help you return to your pre-pregnancy weight more quickly. There are certain health benefits for babies associated with breastfeeding. Breastmilk is easier to digest than formula. The cells, hormones and antibodies in breastmilk help protect your baby from illness.

Your breast milk will change to offer protection and meet the needs of your growing baby. Researchers think that a baby’s saliva transfers chemicals to a mother’s body through breastfeeding. These chemicals help a mother’s body create breast milk that meets the baby’s changing needs. Breastfed babies have lower risk of asthma, childhood leukemia, childhood obesity, ear infections, diarrhea and vomiting, lower respiratory infections, SIDS and type 2 diabetes.

Commercially prepared infant formulas are a nutritious alternative to breast milk, and even contain some vitamins and nutrients that breastfed babies need to get from supplements. Using a bottle to feed your baby offers more flexibility to parents. Dads or partners can feed the baby or a caregiver can feed the baby if the parents are working.

You and your child will benefit from the physical closeness of feeding. Newborns need lots of physical contact to feel secure and comforted. You will benefit from the physical closeness as well. For breastfeeding moms, the skin-to-skin contact with your baby will boost your oxytocin levels that help to calm you and help your breast milk flow.

You may need to return to work while you are still breastfeeding your child. There are many child care providers in Florida that have a Breastfeeding Friendly designation. The Florida Breastfeeding Coalition provides education and support to parents that want to breastfeed and to continue to breastfeed after returning to work.

The decision on how to feed your baby needs to be made based on the needs of your baby, your family’s needs and your health. Whatever your decision, as long as your baby is held and nurtured during feeding and she gets all of the nourishment she needs, she will be happy and healthy.
Child Care Provider Appreciation Day

May is the month to show appreciation to your mom, your child’s teachers and child care providers. These are important people in your child’s world and it is important to express your appreciation to them or help your child show her appreciation for them. May 10, 2019 is the official Child Care Provider Appreciation Day. You may want to send tokens of your appreciation every day of the second week in May (May 6 -10) or just acknowledge your child’s child care provider on the official day.

If your child is a preschooler, involve your child in planning and making a special treat or note for each day of the week. Work with your child to create a special remembrance. Make a special card with your child’s picture on it. Have your child trace her hand and color or paint the hand. Write “Give a big hand for the best teacher (caregiver), Ms. or Mr. !” in the center of the hand.

Ask your child to draw the activities he enjoys the most and write or help him write why he enjoys doing those activities. Your child can draw a picture of the teacher and write what he likes about her class.

You could bring a special cup of coffee or tea or a delicious pastry from a favorite coffee shop, bakery or local restaurant when you drop off your child in the morning. If you like to bake or cook, make a special dessert or a casserole the teacher can take home to share with her family. Get together with other parents and purchase something for the class play area or find out the teacher’s hobby or favorite place to shop and get her a hobby related gift or a gift card.

Check for other ideas in the May Upcoming Events Board on the Office of Early Learning’s Pinterest page.

Most child care providers would appreciate a personal note from you, thanking them for the many ways they enrich the lives of the children in their class.