

Birth to Six Months

Developmental Tasks

Learning to trust others and be secure in the world

Learning (at an unconscious level) how to get personal needs met



What's Happening in the Brain?

During this stage, the child's brain is:

- ❖ A “work-in-progress” as it's been impacted in the womb by nutrition and chemicals (e.g., medication, tobacco, alcohol, other drugs)
- ❖ Only 25% of the size of an adult's brain
- ❖ More developed in the lower region, which controls reflexive behaviors like grasping, crying, sleeping, and feeding
- ❖ Ready to be shaped by interactions with caregivers and surroundings
- ❖ Very vulnerable—trauma, even in infancy, can affect development of attention, memory, language, and thinking

Domains

Physical

Typical Characteristics	Suggested Behaviors for Effective Parenting
Develops own rhythm in feeding, sleeping, and eliminating	Adapt schedule to baby's rhythms as much as possible.
Grows rapidly; doubles birth weight at six months	Supply adequate food.
Gains early control of eye movement	Supply visual stimuli such as mobiles and bright colors.
Develops motor control in orderly sequence: balances head, rolls over, pulls self to sitting position, and briefly sits up alone	Exercise baby's arms and legs during bathing and changing.
Begins to grasp objects	Let baby grasp your finger as you pull him/her.

Emotional

Typical Characteristics	Suggested Behaviors for Effective Parenting
Shows excitement through waving arms, kicking, and wiggling; shows pleasure in anticipation of being fed or picked up	Hold child's arms and legs and help the child move; smile back to acknowledge the child's anticipation.
Expresses distress through crying in different ways when cold, wet, or hungry	Learn to “read” the different cries and offer consistent responses, e.g., when you offer food, the child begins to feed; don't be afraid of “spoiling” the infant. (Crying is the only way an infant has to express needs.)
Fears loud or unexpected noises and sudden movements; strange objects, situations, or persons; and pain	Respond to the child's fears by talking in a calm manner and by picking up and cuddling the child.

Social

Discriminates primary caregiver (usually mother) from others and is more responsive to that person	Do not change primary caregiver before six months.
Imitates movements, gazes at faces, and smiles to be friendly	Play pat-a-cake and peek-a-boo with baby.
Likes to be played with, tickled, and jostled	Bounce the child on your knees.
Smiles at self in mirror	Provide a mirror for gazing.

Mental

Learns through senses (sounds of rattles, feelings of warmth, etc.)	Provide objects to see, hear, and grasp. It is especially important to hold, cuddle, and touch newborns.
Coos and vocalizes spontaneously; babbles in nonsense syllables	Talk and sing to the child a great deal, repeating many words (not just sounds).

Indicators Related to Developmental Lag or Potential Trauma

Feeding problems: rejection of breast or bottle; excessive vomiting, colic, or diarrhea that results in weight loss

Inability to see or hear

Inconsolable crying

Developmental regression: unresponsiveness; failure to smile, show pleasure, or cuddle; rejection of others' efforts to provide comfort

Inability to track caregivers' eyes over time

Loud noise sensitivity and heightened startle response

