



Center for Early Education and Development

Questions About Kids

How Do I Get to Know My Newborn?

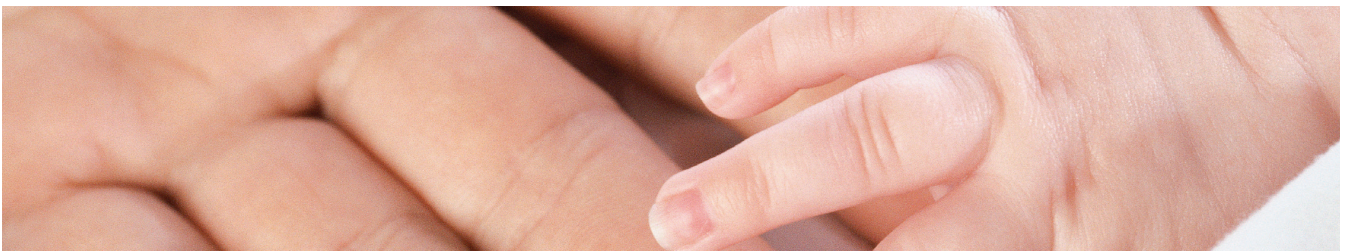
Watch, watch, watch! You may be amazed by all the ways your newborn can communicate with you and what you can learn by just watching. Newborns do come with instructions, but they're not always easy to read! Even brand-new babies have rhythms and moods that change during the day. By observing and trying out different ways of responding, you will learn to recognize how your baby responds to the surrounding world and what he or she needs to be calm and happy.

As you watch and listen to your baby, you may be surprised and amazed by what your newborn can do. Babies are born ready to learn and grow, and you will see the unique ways your newborn adjusts to the world. You may notice:

- **That your baby has many different ways of communicating.** Despite the fact that newborns can't speak, they have many ways of letting you know how they feel — showing interest by gazing at your face, seeking security by grasping your finger, turning their heads when they've had enough, and crying when they are very distressed. Newborns experience mainly feelings of distress or a sense of calm and relaxation.
- **That your baby needs a balance of quiet and stimulation.** Even newborns are interested in the world around them. They can be quite observant and actively check out their surroundings. They turn their heads and slowly scan; they listen and respond to familiar voices; and can focus on items with high contrast, such as your face. Newborns respond best to gentle touching and talking and singing, and when they've had enough, they let you know by turning away, or fussing, or falling asleep.
- **That your baby sometimes fusses, other times cries.** Newborns have different ways of expressing discomfort or upset. When your newborn fusses, you'll see that he or she is quite alert with arms waving or legs kicking, and sometimes crying just a bit. Eyes might be wide open but will not focus on you, or the eyes could be closed. Either way, you may not be able to get your baby's full attention. The baby needs your help to relieve the distress.
- **That your baby sometime sleeps deeply, other times lightly.** Newborns sleep a lot. When your baby is in a deep sleep he or she is resting and growing. Your newborn be able to tune out just about everything during this cycle of deep sleep, and will be very hard to waken. At times like these, respect your baby's need to rest, and wait until he or she wakes up to try and feed or play.

You will likely have no trouble recognizing when your baby is crying. Your baby's cries may differ depending upon whether he or she is hungry, lonely, tired, or wet or soiled. A crying baby is letting you know some kind of help is needed, and will often need your help to become calmer. A young baby cannot be spoiled by being picked up when crying; rather your baby is learning to trust you to meet his or her needs. This is what helps the baby feel calm and secure. And when your baby feels calm and secure, he or she feels your love and care.

When your baby is in a light sleep, eyes will be closed, yet you will sometimes be able to notice them moving under the closed eyelids. You may also notice that breathing is a bit irregular, your baby is sucking and moving, or changing the



expression on his or her face. Your baby might even make a bit of a fuss or crying sound, but then continue to sleep. If you pick up your baby when in a light sleep, your baby will probably wake up.

- **That your baby is sometimes drowsy, other times alert.** Even newborns have short periods of alertness which increase as they get older. When alert, your baby's body is still, with eyes wide open, and he or she shows interest in looking right at you or tuning into your voice. In fact, when alert and attentive, hearing your voice and watching your face are the best activities for your baby. Move your face slowly from one side to the other while you talk and see if he or she can follow you.

When your baby is drowsy, eyes open and close occasionally. When open, eyes look heavy. Your baby may seem unfocused or look rather dazed. He or she can easily fall asleep at this point, or when presented with a face or voice, can become more alert.

Getting to know your baby involves many new and intense interactions. Give yourself time to adjust. Try to keep your commitments to a minimum and rest when your baby sleeps. It is easy to become exhausted. Talking to other new parents and joining a parenting group can help you find both support and perspective. Accept offers of help or ask for help. Give yourself time to watch your baby and learn about parenting this little new person.

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For More Information

For more information about your newborn, call your health care provider or the local Early Childhood Family Education program in your school district or 1-800-KIDS-709 or go to <http://www.zerotothree.org>.

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Questions About Kids is on the Web at:

<http://cehd.umn.edu/ceed>

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The "Question About Kids" series is published by the Center for Early Education and Development to provide state-of-the-art information about young children and families. They are reviewed by a panel of child development experts at the University of Minnesota. For further information, contact the Center at 612-625-3058.