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THE BABY FRIENDLY INITIATIVE

unicef
UNITED KINGDOM

BUILDING A HAPPY BABY
A GUIDE FOR PARENTS

A LITTLE BIT OF SCIENCE

New babies have a strong need to be close to their parents, as this helps them to feel secure and loved. When babies feel secure, they release a hormone called oxytocin. This acts like a fertiliser for their growing brain, helping them to be happy babies and more confident children and adults. Holding, smiling and talking to your baby also releases oxytocin in you, which helps you to feel calm and happy.

MYTH

Babies become spoilt and demanding if they are given too much attention.

REALITY

When babies' needs for love and comfort are met, they will be calmer and grow up to be more confident. You cannot spoil your baby with too much love.

New babies have a strong need to be close to their parents, as this helps them to feel secure and loved.



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GETTING STARTED

During pregnancy, your baby's brain is growing very quickly. You can help this growth by taking some time out to relax and talk to your baby, to stroke your bump, and maybe play some music. Encourage other close family members to do the same.

You can help your baby's brain development during pregnancy by talking, reading, stroking and playing music to your bump.



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MEETING YOUR BABY FOR THE FIRST TIME

After your baby is born, hold them against your skin as soon as possible and for as long as you want. This will calm them and give you both the chance to rest, keep warm and get to know each other.

If you want to breastfeed, this is a great time to start, as your baby might move towards the breast and work out the best way to suckle. Breastfeeding also releases lots of oxytocin in both baby and mother, which will help you to feel close and connected.

If you choose to bottle feed, giving the first feed in skin contact while holding your baby close and looking into their eyes will also help you both to bond.



EARLY DAYS

Keep your baby close to you so that you start to recognise the signals they make to tell you that they are hungry or want a cuddle. Responding to these signals will make your baby feel safe. Cuddling your baby next to your skin allows them to smell you and hear your heartbeat, which will comfort and calm them. This will also help you to feel calm and relaxed, and will help with breastfeeding.

Breastfed babies cannot be overfed, so you can use breastfeeding to soothe your baby and as a way of spending time together or having a rest whenever you both want.

If you are bottle feeding, hold your baby close during feeds and look into their eyes. Learn to notice their cues that they want to be fed and when they have had enough. If you and your partner (if applicable) try and give most of the feeds yourselves, this will help build up a close and loving bond with your baby. Continuing skin-to-skin contact can calm and comfort you both at any time.

MYTH

It's important to get babies into a routine as this makes your life easier.

REALITY

Babies are not capable of learning a routine. Responding to their cues for feeding and comfort makes babies feel secure, so they cry less, which makes your life easier too.

FINDING YOUR RHYTHM

Having a new baby can be challenging. However, as time goes by, you will start to understand what your baby needs. This will help you settle into a rhythm that is right for you both.

Responding to your baby's needs for food and comfort will not only support their brain development, but will also help them feel secure. This will help them to cry less, which makes your life easier too. Holding your baby when they are crying helps them to feel loved and secure, even if they don't stop crying straight away.

Research shows that babies who are responded to in this way grow into more confident toddlers who are better able to deal with being away from their parents temporarily, rather than becoming clingy. This again can help make life less stressful for you.

MYTH

You should leave babies to settle alone so that they learn to be independent.

REALITY

When babies are routinely left alone to settle, they may feel vulnerable, and may become more clingy and insecure.

Slings and parent-facing prams can help baby to feel secure.

MYTH

Babies benefit from lots of toys to help them learn.

REALITY

Looking at your face is the best way for babies to learn. Talking, listening and smiling triggers oxytocin and helps your baby's brain to grow.



Finally, it can be reassuring to know that, despite all the pressure to buy expensive equipment and toys for your baby, you don't really need to spend lots of money. What matters to your baby and their future development is having parents/primary caregivers who love and care for them.

Becoming a new parent can be wonderful, but it can also be difficult. Persistent crying might indicate that your baby is unwell. Speak to your midwife or health visitor if you have any worries about being a new parent.

UNICEF AND THE BABY FRIENDLY INITIATIVE

UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, works to build a better world for every child, every day, everywhere. UNICEF provides more children with clean water, life-saving food and vaccines, education and protection from violence than any other humanitarian organisation. UNICEF works with families, local communities, organisations and governments in more than 190 countries to help every child realise their full potential. In everything we do, the most vulnerable children and those in greatest need have priority.

UNICEF is a multilateral child-rights organisation established by the UN with 70 years of field-tested expertise, a network that spans the globe, a passion for innovation and a commitment to make every penny count. Impartial and non-political, UNICEF is never neutral when it comes to protecting children's rights and safeguarding their lives and futures. UNICEF works in some of the world's toughest places, reaching the furthest from help, the most disadvantaged and the most at risk. UNICEF saves children's lives with vaccines, clean water and therapeutic food. UNICEF protects children from violence, exploitation and abuse. And UNICEF helps children fulfil their potential by supporting quality education and training. UNICEF works for every child, to build a better world for everyone.

UNICEF IN THE UK

The United Kingdom Committee for UNICEF (UNICEF UK) is a registered charity that raises funds for UNICEF's emergency and development work around the world and advocates for lasting change for children worldwide. This includes, for example, working to change UK Government policies and practices that are harmful to child rights in the UK and internationally. UNICEF UK is one of 33 UNICEF national charitable organisations based in industrialised countries. In the UK, UNICEF UK works with the hospitals where children are born, the schools where children learn and grow, and the services that shape their lives, to make sure that every child has the same chance to shine.

Support UNICEF today to help our work for every child, to build a better world for everyone.

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