



Your newborn: Face time and emotional health

Infants are happier and healthier when they feel safe and connected. The way you and others relate to your infant affects the many new connections that are forming in the baby's brain. These early brain connections are the basis for learning, behavior and health. Early, caring relationships prepare your baby's brain for the future.

Meet baby's basic needs

You meet your newborn's most basic needs when you regularly feed your infant, soothe your infant to sleep, and change dirty diapers. This calm and consistent care helps him feel safe. With time, your baby will link your voice, touch, and face with this soothing sense of safety. This early bond with you is the start of important social, emotional, and language skills.

Make time for face time

By the time babies are 6 to 8 weeks old, they may smile back when they see a face. These "social smiles" are

both fun and important. Make time for "face time"! That means taking time to smile at your baby's face and to return a smile whenever your baby smiles.

As your baby grows, social smiles lead to conversations. For example:

- When you smile, your infant will smile back.
- When you coo, your baby coos.
- When you laugh, he laughs.

This "dance" between you and your baby is fun for both of you. It is a great way to encourage your baby's new skills as they appear. For this important dance to work, calmly and consistently meet your baby's needs ... and smile!

If your child learns early in life that he can easily get your attention by smiling or cooing or being happy, he will keep it up. But if you do not make time for face time, he may give up on smiling and try more fussing, crying and screaming to get the attention he needs.

Take care of you

If you are too busy with your own life, your baby may not develop a basic sense of safety. If you are anxious, depressed, or dealing with substance abuse, you may not notice your baby's attempts to bond and smile with you. Even if you do notice your baby's social smiles, it can be hard to smile back if you don't feel well.

The first few weeks of your infant's life can be very stressful. You have to adjust to more responsibilities and less sleep. To make this important period of bonding successful:

- Make sure your own needs are met so you can meet your child's needs.
- Ask for family or community support so you can take care of yourself.
- Ask your doctor for more information. Reducing your stress helps both you and your baby and allows the dance to begin!

