



Speaking for Children

What's best for our youngest children is best for everyone!

Caring for Infants and Toddlers

The first years are a wondrous time. As the months pass, parents are able to form deep, affectionate bonds with their babies and marvel at their rapid growth. Infants need a small, consistent group of people whom they can learn to know and trust. When babies are in childcare settings, it is important for group sizes to remain small (with at least one adult for every three infants) so that secure, meaningful relationships can form and each infant's needs for attention, affection and routine care can be met. Toddlers continue to need secure attachments and a great deal of individual attention.

Crying

Babies come into this world ready for relationships—each with a unique personality and style of communication. Babies tell us about their feelings and needs through their facial expressions and body movements, as well as by cooing, babbling, and crying. Crying is one of the main ways babies communicate. They cry to tell us that they want or need something to happen—perhaps a diaper change, a feeding, a nap, or a hug. Always comfort baby when he cries—you can't spoil a baby.

Routine Care

Routine care, such as feeding a baby or changing a diaper, provides rich opportunities for one-to-one contact. Be sure to feed and change infants and put them down for naps based on their needs, not according to a schedule. Hold your baby during bottle-feeding in order to take advantage of this time for closeness and interaction. Keep in mind that too much stimulation, such as bright lights and constant noise, may overwhelm infants

and cause them stress.

Infants' immunity to infectious disease is just beginning to build. Remember to wash your hands and take other sanitary precautions before and after feeding, diapering, and toileting. Keep sick children home so the infection or illness is not spread to other children and adults.

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Talking with Infants

Even before they understand words, babies love to hear language and respond by cooing, babbling, and making sounds that gradually resemble adult speech. During the first two years of life, children understand much more than they can say. You can help children learn new words by noticing the things that catch their attention, naming them, and talking about them. Repeatedly using newly learned words will reinforce them and build your child's vocabulary. By using the same words in different ways ("You have a face. And the clock has a face, too"), or finding different ways to say the same thing ("It's big, it's huge, it's gigantic") you can help children build a richer, more expressive vocabulary as they grow.

Safe Exploration

Infants need many opportunities to explore their world using all of their senses. As your baby begins to crawl and then walk, a safe environment is essential. From your child's perspective, if it's in view, it's interesting; and if

it's in reach, it will be investigated. That's why it is important to "child proof" all settings where young children spend time. Potential dangers include unlocked cabinets, uncovered electrical outlets, medicines and cleaning supplies, and small objects that can be put into a child's mouth. You can prevent accidents with close supervision and frequent inspection to spot new dangers that crop up as children grow and develop.



Toddlers' Intense Feelings

Toddlers are very involved in learning about themselves in relation to the world around them. Their day often involves conflict with siblings, playmates, and the adults around them. Keep in mind that when a toddler wants something, she typically wants it intensely and immediately. If you are caring for more than one child, you can help reduce conflict by making sure there are enough toys and materials for all to share. It's also important that your toddler has enough time and space to fully explore her environment. Be sure she has plenty of opportunities to make real choices and decisions, like what snack food she prefers (you can make sure the choices are healthy ones) or which shirt she wants to wear.

When toddlers don't get what they want, tempers often flare. Children can be frightened by their own feelings and actions, and they rely on the adults around them to remain calm. In simple language, say what specific behaviors are expected and what will happen if the rules are not followed ("Stop throwing the crackers, or I will put

them away.") Let your child know that you (or other caregivers) are there to help her work through her intense emotions.

Things to Remember

- Listen carefully to your baby's cries. Babies use different sounding cries for different reasons and it's important to try to tune in to what your child is telling you.
- It is quite common for infants to develop "separation anxiety" and "stranger anxiety" during the second half of their first year. Although it can be upsetting to see your baby cry inconsolably when you leave her, it shows that she has a close bond with you. Stay calm when this happens, and reassure your child with words and physical comfort that she will be well cared for in your absence, and that you will return. A special object from home such as a blanket or stuffed animal can help comfort your child while you are away.
- Think of ways you can support your toddler's need for independence such as offering simple choices, encouraging safe exploration or letting her make something herself.
- At the infant and toddler stage of development, everything is typically very sensory, physical and oral. Babies tend to put things in their mouths and toddlers want to touch just about everything with their hands. Keep in mind that this is how young children learn and it is a part of normal growth and development.

Things to Avoid

- Avoid getting angry with your infant or toddler for normal developments or behavior such as putting things in his mouth, crying, soiling his pants or grabbing objects (or other babies).
- Be sure not to prop up a bottle for your baby to feed herself. She needs to be held and responded to during feeding.
- Avoid strapping a baby in a seat or rocker for extended periods of time. Babies learn from exploring the world and handling objects.

Source: www.pbs.org/wholechild

About First 5 Sonoma County

First 5 Sonoma County funds children's health insurance and programs that improve childcare quality, help children succeed in school, and help parents provide safe and nurturing environments for their children. For more information on *First 5 Sonoma County* and its programs, please call 565-6626 or visit www.first5sonomacounty.org