

# Lamaze®

PREGNANCY, BIRTH & BEYOND

Simple Pleasures, Shared Discoveries

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Adapted from the original article by Joy Rittmayer, PhD, LCCE

**CONGRATULATIONS!** You are beginning one of life's most exciting journeys—parenthood. Some days are as effortless as a day at the beach, and others are as challenging as hacking through uncharted jungle. Sometimes the rewards of parenting are obvious, and others are realized later. Along the way, discoveries about your baby and yourself make sure life with a little one is never dull!

## GROWING CONFIDENCE

Understandably, many new and expectant parents worry about caring for their baby and understanding the baby's needs. The early stages of life with your baby will go more smoothly if you let your baby be your tour guide. She will show you when she's hungry, sleepy, or needing comfort. When you respond promptly and with love, your baby learns that the world is a safe place and trusts you to be there to meet her needs. In turn, you will grow to trust your parenting ability as you learn to read your baby's cues – both the obvious and the subtle. Feel her whole body relax when she is snuggled on your chest. Notice how she turns away when she has had enough time looking at something. Listen to the smacking sounds she makes when she is getting hungry. Watch your baby's signals and her responses to your actions and learn as you go.

## EARLY RECOGNITION

The easiest way to think about interacting with your baby is that you are your baby's favorite everything – place to be, face, voice, food source, snoozing spot and more. It's fun to think that before and after birth, you are your baby's natural habitat! Even though some parents need a few days to feel connected to their baby, babies come to us already in love. They are ready for interaction and are deeply connected to their parents. So take pride and delight in how soundly the baby sleeps on your chest and how your baby settles down in your

arms after being fussy with a visitor.

Since he has been listening to you talk and laugh for the last months of pregnancy, your voice is familiar and comforting. Indeed, no matter what your singing abilities, to him, yours is the sweetest of voices. Also, he knows the rhythm of your body and may enjoy snuggling up to hear the symphony of breaths and heart beats. Hold your newborn close, and within days of birth, he will recognize your smell. He will be mesmerized by your face, which he will see clearly when nursing or being cradled in your arms. Believe it or not, you know many ways to comfort him just by being you!

## WHAT DO BABIES REALLY NEED?

When asked this question, most people respond with the obvious answers—food, cleanliness, comfort, safety, and sleep. Equally important are the emotional needs of babies. Just like us, they need to feel loved, secure, and connected. Human babies are hard-wired to interact. This interaction takes on many forms – enjoying moments of gazing into each others' eyes, kissing her feet during a bath, holding her while dancing and singing along to your favorite music, reading out loud, or playing peek-a-boo just to name a few. Think of all of this loving interaction as food for your baby's brain! Humans need this connection and stimulation, just as they need food to survive. As long as you follow your baby's cues, you can't be too responsive or playful, so have fun.



### UNDERSTANDING CRYING

Crying is a part of life for human beings. Just like us, when babies cry, they are reaching out for help and comfort. This might be in response to hunger, a dirty diaper, loneliness, or boredom to name a few. Whatever the reason, parents should respond to their baby's cries promptly. Tuning in to your baby's cues will help you to differentiate his cries, and sometimes help you to meet his needs before he even begins to cry.

Making sure your baby feels secure is one way to diminish crying. Many babies like to be swaddled, which likely reminds them of being snug inside during pregnancy. When babies cry vigorously, they tend to flail their arms and kick their legs. Maybe this is where the expression "kicking and screaming" came from! If your baby seems to stress during diaper changes, try gently holding her arms to her chest to simulate that snug feeling and help her settle down.

When babies cry after a long day of overly stimulating visitors, they need just what we do after a difficult day at work—to feel comforted and heard. Unlike us, they can't make a polite excuse to leave the room and take a break for a few minutes. This often leads to crankiness later. When you have checked your baby's diaper and offered a feed to no avail, click into your knowledge about how to comfort people. Hold your baby close, take her to a quiet place where you can really focus, talk, and listen. Babies often respond to compassion in our voices, so go ahead and say what you would to an upset friend. We don't always understand why a baby is crying, but decreasing the stimuli (lowering the lights, turning off the TV or radio, and speaking in a quiet voice while moving around slowly) often helps.



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### DAILY DISCOVERIES

You are your baby's best and most important teacher and there is learning in every day. The opportunities for interaction are infinite, and you'll likely find it easier to get more done. In life, it

is rare for a day to be pure fun – family and work responsibilities are ever present. It's great for children to gain this understanding early and learn to find the joy in every day even if it is just laundry day!

Apart from a few essentials, your baby doesn't require much in terms of equipment. When choosing baby gear, stick to the items that foster your closeness and engagement. Since everything is new and interesting to him, don't worry about creating a stimulating environment. Including him in your activities, educates him through exposure to different sights, sounds, and smells. Wearing your baby in a sling or front carrier is especially entertaining since he can see from an adult's vantage point. As you move throughout the days, tell him what you are doing and thinking. At around three months of age, your baby will babble back at you. Pause for his reply after speaking and you will be helping him to learn the rhythm of conversation. As he discovers his voice, he will delight in the variety of squeals, growls, and coos especially if you mimic the sounds back.

### ENJOYING THE RIDE

Our babies offer us a second chance to discover the joys found in simple things – blowing bubbles, splashing in the tub, walking barefoot. Many parents are thrilled to re-read their favorite childhood books, and sing long forgotten rhymes and songs. Allow yourself to be guided by your baby and trust that he will give you the cues you need to take great care of him. Above all, remember to enjoy your baby. The one guarantee we have as parents is that our babies will grow too fast!

With special thanks  
to our Presenting Partner

**HUGGIES**