



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, which 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.

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# GETTING STARTED

During pregnancy, your baby's brain is growing very quickly and you can help this growth by taking some time out to relax and talk to him, to stroke your bump and maybe play some music to him. 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.



# MEETING YOUR BABY FOR THE FIRST TIME

After your baby is born, hold him against your skin as soon as possible, and for as long as you want. This will calm him 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 for himself. Breastfeeding also releases lots of oxytocin in 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 his eyes will also help you bond.



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# EARLY DAYS

Keep your baby close to you so that you start to recognise the signals he makes to tell you he is hungry or wants a cuddle. Responding to these signals will make your baby feel safe. Cuddling your baby next to your skin allows him to smell you and hear your heartbeat, which will comfort and calm him. 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 his eyes. Learn to notice his cues that he wants to be fed and when he has had enough. If you and your partner 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

Young 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 his brain development but will also help him feel secure, so he will cry less, which helps make your life easier too. Holding your baby when he is crying helps him to feel loved and secure, even if he doesn'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 and spoilt. 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 they think they have been abandoned, and so become more clingy and insecure when their parents return.



Slings and parent-facing prams can help make your baby 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.



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

**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 works around the world, including right here in the UK, to keep all children healthy, happy and safe. We help more children than any other humanitarian organisation. We keep them safe when war or disaster strike. We provide life-saving food, clean water and vaccinations. We protect them from violence and exploitation. We give them a safe place to laugh and play. We help get them into school and give them the chance of a better future. All over the world, we're working with our partners and supporters to make the world a safer place for every child.

Here in the UK we're putting our years of experience working for children around the world into practice in the places that reach them day in, day out. We're working with the hospitals where they are born, the schools where they learn and grow, the communities and the services that shape their lives to make sure every child has the same chance to shine.

The Unicef UK Baby Friendly Initiative is revolutionising healthcare for babies, their mothers and families, as part of a wider global partnership between the World Health Organization (WHO) and Unicef. We enable public services to better support families with feeding and developing close, loving relationships, ensuring that all babies get the best possible start in life.



[unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly](https://unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly)

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