

Find a Head Start job near you or anywhere in the U.S. </job-center>

Tips for Keeping Infants and Toddlers Safe: A Developmental Guide for Home Visitors – Young Infants

Infants depend on their families for food, warmth, and care, and for meeting such basic needs as eating, diapering, sleeping, bonding, and safety. But all babies are unique. Some infants may settle easily and be capable of quickly soothing themselves. Others may cry often or for long periods of time. In order to thrive, infants need nurturing, consistent, and responsive caregivers. Home visitors support family members to develop a responsive relationship with their child and respond positively to the baby's cries, coos, and other communication attempts. Responsive caregiving is at the heart of young children's development. The architecture of their brain is literally shaped by every single experience they have.

During the first months of life, a young infant's neck is not strong enough to support the weight of their head. Home visitors can demonstrate how to support a baby's early movements by gently holding and positioning the infant's body, head, and neck to prevent injury. They can help families to understand the importance of providing supervised "tummy time </physical-health/article/tummy-time>" experiences in a safe space for young infants. These experiences give babies a chance to build the muscles they need to hold up their neck, control the movement of their arms and legs, roll over (4–6 months), sit up (7–9 months), and eventually get ready for crawling, cruising, and walking. Young infants also begin to roll over and sometimes move in unexpected ways. Home visitors may talk with families about the need for close supervision at all times to prevent falls

<<https://www.cdc.gov/safekid/falls/index.html>>, the leading cause of unintentional, nonfatal injury among young children. In addition, as young infants begin to grasp objects, they need to have access to safe materials to avoid choking or suffocating.

Infants' feeding skills evolve as they mature. At first, they only are able to suck and swallow liquids. Over time, they gain more control of their tongue and mouth, which allows them to begin to eat pureed and strained food from a spoon. Home visitors can discuss the importance of observing infants carefully when they are eating so they do not choke. Conversations about food must be respectful of the family's culture and food preferences and support safe and culturally responsive feeding practices.

Young infants are constantly reacting to the world around them. Brightly colored objects, toys that make noises, and soothing music may stimulate or calm babies. Home visitors work with families to observe their child's reaction to different types and levels of stimulation through sights, sounds, and touch. They also help parents to respond by providing a nurturing and safe environment with enough stimulation to meet each child's needs and interests. "Remember with all babies—timing and match

are important! (Your) job...is to recognize (a) baby's natural tendencies, meet her where she is at, and then provide the external support she needs to handle the stimulation that is naturally at the heart of everyday interactions with her caregivers and the world around her."¹

¹ Gouley, Kathleen Kiely, "Stimulation and Development during Infancy: Tuning In to Your Baby's Cues," n.d., New York University Child Study Center, <http://thelifehabit.com/formative-years/512-stimulation-and-development-during-infancy-tuning-in-to-your-baby-s-cues> <<http://thelifehabit.com/formative-years/512-stimulation-and-development-during-infancy-tuning-in-to-your-baby-s-cues>>

▶ General Safety

▶ Diapering

▶ Feeding

▶ Sleeping

▶ Playing

Additional Resources

[Healthy Home Visiting](#) </professional-development/article/healthy-home-visiting>

« [Go to Tips for Keeping Infants and Toddlers Safe](#) </safety-practices/article/tips-keeping-infants-toddlers-safe-developmental-guide-home-visitors>

Read more:

Safe environments, Safety Practices

Last Updated: April 21, 2022