



THE SECRET TO A SMARTER BABY

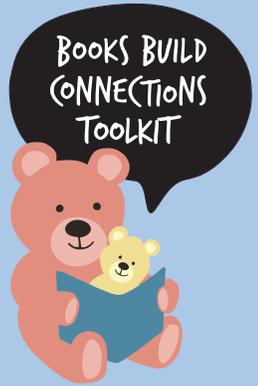
How do you raise a smart baby? Talk to her, play with her, walk with her, sing to her, imitate sounds, cuddle her, read to her every day, and turn off the television and other electronic devices.

As parents, we all want happy, healthy babies. Not only that, we want them to be smart. For anyone entering parenthood today, this desire seems to translate into a trip to the toy store and a big dent in the family budget. The truth is that you don't need any make-your-baby-brilliant products that line store shelves these days. You don't need to spend a penny to help your baby be smarter.

That's right. Despite the hype and the ads, we're not buying it. There just isn't convincing scientific evidence that these expertly marketed, hi-tech baby toys, with all of their bells and whistles, lead to more advanced brain development.

As you think about what kinds of activities will support your baby's early learning, you can start by remembering that the real baby Mozart never had a CD, a DVD, or an iPad! What, then, is the secret to a smarter baby? The answer is, above all else, the loving interactions that you (and your baby's other caregivers) will share with your baby over the upcoming days, weeks, and months. Perhaps the most important message is that you don't need to put too much pressure on yourself when considering what to do with your baby. The best types of activities are simple. Here is a short list to get you started:

- **Talk to your baby whenever you can.** Sound simple? That's because it is. Some new parents feel funny about talking to babies who can't talk back, but this isn't the same as talking to yourself. Take the time to talk to your baby. Talk while changing his diaper and giving him a bath or during meals and bedtime routines. Tell him about your plans for the day or just comment on whatever comes to mind. Even before your baby can talk, back-and-forth conversation will help your baby learn the meaning of words and later be more ready to start school. So, ask him questions and then answer them; name and label what you see inside and outside your home. The details may be lost on him for a while, but he'll definitely be listening and learning.



TALK



READ



SING



FAMILY RESOURCE: The Secret To a Smarter Baby



- **Take a walk.** By taking a walk, you'll both get some fresh air and you'll get some exercise. It will also give you many more interesting things to talk about with your baby. Front-pouch carriers offer you the close contact that will help you carry on a *conversation* with your baby. Make sure that when you take your baby for a walk in a stroller you continue to talk with her. Stop from time to time to tell her about what you see together—and wait to see whether she has something to say about it too!
- **Sing, sing a song.** One of the classic *Sesame Street* songs says it perfectly: *Don't worry if you're not good enough for anyone else to hear, just sing, sing a song!* Your baby or toddler not only will cut you some slack if you happen to sing off key, but will become your biggest fan right away.
- **Imitate.** Start by sticking your tongue out; you may be surprised to find that your newborn copies you. Move on to making other funny faces and repeating the sounds your baby makes. Before long you'll find that he'll imitate you too.
- **Stay in touch.** Babies and toddlers love having close physical contact with their parents and caregivers. Your baby can be calmed by being held and rocked. Your toddler will probably adore rough and tumble play but also will want to cuddle with you. Massage is another great way to stay in touch with your baby. Beyond just being relaxing, touch is an important way babies experience the world. This close physical contact can help you connect.
- **Read a book.** The entire reading-with-your-baby experience fosters fun and appeals to many of her senses. Reading together provides her close contact from being held, comfort from the sound of your voice, and pictures and pages to watch go by. Don't worry if your baby pays attention to books for only a short time at first. It's the time you share and the sound of your voice that your baby will care about most. So cuddle together and make reading a warm and wonderful experience! Babies are born learning, and the amount of language they are exposed to in the earliest months and years has everything to do with how they develop and succeed.
- **Play pretend games together.** Along with reading aloud and talking, playing pretend games with children can be one of the best ways they learn language and good behavior and become ready to start school. Pretending can be as simple as you and your child becoming characters and making up a story or adventure together. Stories can be based on the books that you have read together or a place you have visited. Simple toys such as dolls and play food, for example, can be very helpful as you take part in pretend play. Surprisingly, expensive and sophisticated iPads and electronic toys with bright lights and sounds can get in the way of pretending together!
- **Turn off the television and other devices.** Your baby learns the most from you—the time you spend together, the words and sounds you make together, the activities you enjoy together such as singing, reading aloud and pretending. Time spent in front of a screen makes it harder for parents and caregivers to have





high-quality learning time with their children. So turn off the television and other electronic devices whenever you can. But when the television or device is on, make sure that the program is for young children and that it is educational and not violent. Watch the program with your child and talk to your child about the program.

Adapted from *Heading Home with Your Newborn*, 2nd Edition (Copyright © 2010 American Academy of Pediatrics), Revised by the AAP Council on Early Childhood, 2014

Other family resources related to early literacy and early learning include the following:

- Helping Your Child Learn to Read
- Sharing Books With Your Baby up to Age 11 Months
- Sharing Books With Your 1-Year-Old
- Sharing Books With Your 2-Year-Old
- Sharing Books With Your Preschooler
- Sharing Books With Your School-Age Child
- Why It Is Never Too Early to Start Reading With Your Baby

Pediatric Professional ePubs in this AAP series include the following:

- Evidence Supporting Early Literacy and Early Learning
- Finding the Right Book for Every Child
- Selecting Books for Your Program
- What Every Pediatric Professional Can Do to Promote Early Literacy and Early Learning

Please visit aap.org/literacy for further information about resources mentioned within this publication and additional resources on early literacy.

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