



9-12 Months

At 9 months, babies have their own ideas about themselves and the world. They are masters at asserting themselves in all sorts of ways, both charming (finding you in another room and pulling himself up on your leg to give you a big hug) and frustrating (throwing food he doesn't care for off the highchair or refusing to lie down for a diaper change). You might hand him a toy only to have him fling it to the floor and scream. He doesn't want that toy . . . he wants the other one! And if you can't read his mind and give him that desired toy, he'll just continue to complain and protest until he gets his hands on what he does want. Thankfully, at 9 months, babies are mastering the idea that things that they can't see still exist, so he'll soon be able to find what he's looking for himself.

Your easygoing little guy is emerging as a very intense and powerful force. This requires a real adjustment on your part; just as your baby is developing new skills by leaps and bounds, it seems you need a whole new set of strategies to parent this very strong individual. It's no wonder you're still so tired, even though your baby may finally be sleeping through the night. You needn't feel guilty that you find yourself eager to tuck him in at the end of the day so you can have some time to yourself. But when you're at your wit's end, remember, this self-assertion - often called willfulness - is really not a bad thing! When you think about the abilities you want your child to have as he grows, knowing what he wants and going for it is key to his success.

Hellos and Goodbyes

Separations--whether daily or occasional--can be hard on you as well as your child. But helping her adapt to these comings and goings can actually support your baby's social and emotional development.

Good-byes through your baby's eyes:

Some days, I cry when you leave. I might also cry or ignore you when you come back. That doesn't mean I've been miserable the whole time you were away. It just means that when I see you, it reminds me that you've been gone, and I need and love you so much that I get overwhelmed and have to cry. I know I'm safe to share my deepest feelings with you, and that's why I can show you when I'm sad. When you need to leave me, it helps if you spend some time with me and my caregiver. When you smile and talk with her, I feel safe because I'm staying with someone you like. When I'm bigger, let me take a picture of you or something else that's special from home. And please, don't ever just sneak out on me, even if it seems like it will be easier. It only makes me fearful that at any moment you might disappear without warning. Saying good-bye to me makes me trust you more. Over time, I will learn that whenever you leave, you come back.

What your baby is learning from hellos and good-byes:

When you show respect for your baby's feelings--by letting her know you are leaving and helping her cope with your separations--she begins to recognize and handle her own feelings. When you establish predictable routines, you build her security and trust. She learns what to expect and feels in control of her world. As she learns to handle separations, she develops trusting relationships with other nurturing adults, learning that others can take good care of her, too. Her social and emotional skills may get a boost if she is being cared for alongside other children.

What you can do:

- Understand how your child best copes with separations. Does it help for you to spend some time playing with her in the center before you leave, or does she adjust better if you say a quick good-bye?
- As she grows, tell her what to expect, "You'll have circle time, then have snack, play outside on the playground and then Mommy comes back!" Because she doesn't yet understand real time, this gives her a sense of when things will happen and in what order.

Reading your baby's cues

	What to expect	What you can do
<i>Look, I've found it</i>	At around 9 months, babies begin to develop an awareness that things continue to exist, even when they don't see them. This is called "object permanence."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play hide-and-seek games that will help him master object permanence. After you show him the ball, hide it behind the couch and encourage him to hunt for it. • Talk to him when you move out of his sight so he knows you are near. This will reduce his anxiety and may help him play alone for a few minutes. • Be patient! Babies often become very persistent as they develop "object permanence." They remember the toy they had yesterday and they want exactly the same thing now!
<i>Goodbyes are hard</i>	Separations may become more difficult. As your baby's new physical independence increases, so does her emotional dependence on you.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When saying good-bye, use positive language--with your words and body. Children take their cues from you. So, with a smile, tell her that you will really miss each other, but that she is going to have so much fun with Miss Marie. And when you come back, like you always do, you'll read your favorite book together! • Give her a picture of you. Make an audio tape of yourself singing songs or reading a cherished book.
<i>Watch me move</i>	Your child becomes more independent as he uses his body to move away from you - creeping, crawling, or even taking baby steps.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer him a "safe base." He needs to know you'll still be there when he decides he's gone far enough. This sense of security helps him feel safe to venture out again. • Avoid walkers. They can be dangerous and can interfere with muscle and joint development. • Recognize his need to practice new skills. If

		he refuses to lie down for diaper changes, you can say "You don't want to lie down now that you can stand all by yourself! Okay, we'll do this together. You hold the diaper while I fasten it."
<i>I get it</i>	Your child understands more than she can say and can even follow simple commands such as "Go get your ball."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put her actions into words and build on them. "You're holding bear. Does he want a drink?" and hold out a cup • Use visual cues to help build comprehension. Ask, "Where are your shoes?" as you point to them.
<i>I've got something to say</i>	Your child uses his gestures and vocalizations to communicate. He may point to the juice and say "juju" to show you what he wants. He may push the cracker off the highchair and say "nuhnuh."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help him show you what he wants. Present two toys and ask, "Which do you want?" Encourage him to respond by pointing or reaching. If he looks at or talks to one toy more than the other, say, "You want this one!" • Play back-and-forth games. Roll a ball to your baby and encourage him to roll it back. These games promote his social development and lead to the back and forth of conversations.
<i>I want what I want</i>	Your child may become more selective about foods (and everything else!) and want to eat on her own.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer her choices because yesterday's favorite food may be rejected tomorrow. Be patient and experiment with foods to help her find what she likes. • Allow and encourage her to feed herself. She can practice using a spoon and drinking from a sipper cup. She will be proud to be in charge of her feeding when you give her the chance. Of course, she'll need some help.
<i>Just say "no"</i>	Your child discovers "No!" and uses it with great abandon.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn to distinguish what your baby means by "No!" It can be his way of declaring his independence. When he kicks and shouts and shakes his head, "No," as you lift him into the car, he may be saying, "I'm the boss of me!" He may be sharing his likes and dislikes -- "No peas . . . more carrots." Or, he may be telling you, "I'm too tired to cope," as he protests, "No" when you carry him to his crib.
<i>Keep me safe</i>	Your baby loves to explore, but she still needs grown-ups to keep her safe.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a safe home. It helps to get down on all fours to see your home from your baby's viewpoint to make sure no dangers are within reach. Install baby gates, outlet covers and other safety items where necessary. • Create a stimulating home without having to spend a lot of money on expensive toys. Make sure each room contains things that interest her, like big, colorful books in the family room or a drawer full of plastic containers in the kitchen.