



The Importance of Touch

Touch continues to be an important source of sensory input or "sensory nourishment" during infancy. Being held in a caregiver's arms tells the infant he or she is safe, secure and loved. Touch helps build a sense of trust. It can be soothing and reassuring. Consistent and responsive touch helps an infant and caregiver feel attached to one another. Our expressions of caring through touching, rocking, talking, smiling, and singing are a kind of nourishment for the baby. These experiences, repeated many times over the course of a day, provide the foundation for the brain's early organization. Holding and stroking an infant stimulates the brain to release important hormones necessary for growth.

Just as adults are all unique, infants are too. They have different temperaments. Find out what she likes and how much she wants to be cuddled and touched. You do not want to over-stimulate babies. Infants can't use words to communicate their moods, preferences, or needs, but they send signals to the adults who care for them. The sounds they make, their facial expressions, and the way they make or avoid eye contact are all clues to what they want and need. Paying close attention to an infant's needs for stimulation, as well as her need for quiet times, helps her form secure attachments and learn to self soothe and calm herself.

What you can do?

- Hold the infant when the infant needs to be held. The infant may try to tell you he wants to be held, for example, by crying, fussing, reaching for you, or gazing toward you.
- You can hold an infant while you tend to the verbal needs of another child.
- Provide other "touch" experiences for the infant, even at this very early age. Put the infant on different surfaces - try towels, rough blankets, soft blankets, straw mats.
- Allow the infant to touch sticky surfaces, smooth surfaces, bumpy surfaces (bubble wrap is not only fun for adults!) and cold surfaces.
- Watch for signs of what kinds of touch the infant likes and dislikes. Does he smile and seem to enjoy the experience or does he fuss and pull away. Stop any touch experiences the infant seems to dislike.
- Infants sense things (touch) through many parts of their body. Rub noses, touch elbows and knees.

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