

School Begins at Birth Series Year One, Month Four

Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service • Oklahoma State University

Your baby is now four months old!

During the first year, infants spend a lot of time and energy learning about the world around them. They sort out and organize the information coming to them through all their senses.

Infants need many experiences to help them learn and understand information. Now your baby's eye muscles have strengthened and can follow just about anything that moves nearby.

Now your child watches the calico cat that wanders by. Your baby looks further to see the older sister on a red bike. A four-month-old baby notices the fluttering drapes at the open window.

Try to encourage your child's interests by providing exciting and stimulating visual experiences. Toys are no substitute for people. You are still your baby's most interesting playmate and most important visual stimulus. Time with you is the best growth stimulation you can give. Young children prefer to look at people's faces rather than inanimate objects. At four months of age, your little one will have learned your face well and will prefer it over all others. Your child may become very choosy about your face, perhaps preferring your eyes over your mouth or nose.

Talk to your baby. Touch your infant. Hold your child close to your face to see your eyes. Then your baby can feel and hear your love.



Remember, your child is unique - unlike any other child you know or will read about.

stimulate the child's brain. The child begins to trust. The world is a rewarding place. It is possible to have some control over the world.

Every day you and your child learn something from each other. You teach and learn through the senses. In this way you can build a solid base of confidence and trust so necessary for life experiences outside of the home.

Mental Development

You are your baby's first and best teacher. Your child will learn more from you than anyone else in a lifetime of instruction. The learning process, however, works both ways. From the very first day, you and your baby have been teaching each other. You stimulate your child's senses by touching, cooing, loving and nurturing. Your baby stimulates your senses. Your child cries for food, a diaper change, a burp, a caress or attention. Your baby smiles in response to the comforts you provide. Since your baby's cries, facial expressions, and body language stimulate your actions, you can learn something new about this tiny human being every time this happens.

Child development studies by Erik H. Erickson (1902-) show that holding and talking to the baby

Emotional Development

Stimulating your baby is a natural part of caring for him or her. You may be afraid that you can not manage the tasks of caring for your baby and being your baby's first teacher too. When you relax and enjoy yourself, your baby will too. Some of your emotions may be more important to understand at this point than your baby's.

Sometimes new parents find it difficult to relax because they worry about how to handle their infants. Some fathers, in particular, think they are too clumsy to care for newborns. They put off close physical contact until their children are old enough for rough and tumble play. As a result, fathers sometimes miss a great deal of pleasure, and opportunities for building a closer relationship with their children. Infants need gentle handling, but they are not china dolls. They enjoy security of

when you hold them in strong, firm hands.

Many modern parents are trying to free themselves from traditional sex roles. Studies show that many parents behave differently with boy and girl babies. Parents tend to imitate and respond to the sounds of girls more. Some researchers have wondered if this is why girls usually talk earlier than boys. On the other hand, parents often stimulate muscular development more with boys. They offer thumbs to grasp and help them to their feet when they start to pull themselves up.

Girls and boys have different developmental patterns. No one is sure what has the greater effect on specific skills, the child's sex or the parents' response to the child's sex. Remember that each baby is born with a specific skill potential and different ways of responding. Some babies are more passive; others are more active, regardless of sex. All babies need stimulation and care if they are to grow into loving and caring adults.

Remember, your child is unique, unlike any other child you know or will read about.

Social Development

Your child probably is getting to be quite a social tyke. Four-month-olds spend most of their waking hours babbling, smiling and laughing. They can anticipate being picked up and almost understand when it is bathtime. They may hear bath water being poured and get excited to be in it. Remember: Never leave baby alone in the bath tub.

Provide your child with space and equipment to express a growing personality and self. Offer toys that are safe to use and give your baby plenty of



At four months of age, your little one will have learned your face well and will prefer it over all others.

room to experiment with them. Babies learn by playing.

Often at four months, infants recognize certain people and realize other are strangers. They may talk, coo and laugh when they see other children, or scream when grandma picks them up. This is normal behavior. Grandma may be a stranger and will take some getting used to; other children may seem more safe.

Do not worry about spoiling your infant by paying too much attention to him or her. You probably should not hold your child in your arms all day. Take advantage of the wakeful times and feelings to build your relationship. Look at your baby and give him or her opportunities to look at you. Your child needs to see the love and pride in your eyes. Talk and sing. Infants love the soothing sound of your voice and the fun of hearing you respond to them. Hold your child with a firm and tender touch. By responding to your child's needs you help the child build trust and feel secure. This is very important for the child and will probably make life easier for you in the future.

Language Development

Your child's main way of practicing speech sounds is through babbling. Probably the best time for practice is anytime you have a chance to be with your baby — just before napping, upon awakening, at bath time, in the car.

You may have noticed recently that "h" is your child's favorite consonant and that "ae" is a favorite vowel sound. Have you heard your child saying "hey" a lot? Your echo, saying "hey" right back, is very important feedback.

Some infants learn to make clicking noises with their tongues. Make a game of it and click your tongue in response.

By the end of the fourth month your child may surprise you with a real belly laugh. This may be a while in coming but if something really pleases your child you will hear this adult-sounding laugh. You will probably find yourself laughing back. Remember to reward those smiles and laughs more than the cries.

Small Muscle Development

One of your child's greatest accomplishments will be placing the thumb and forefinger together in a pinching motion. When your baby does this (around 7-10 months of age) and brings the whole hand in front of the eyes it is a joyous day. It is cause for celebration. Your child will have mastered a very important skill. For now, your child begins this learning by reaching for objects and raking them in toward self. Your baby will need this ability to grasp objects.

Activities for Growth

From now until six months of age your baby will reach out and grasp for things — a wonderful accomplishment when it occurs. Now is the time to provide toys that will stimulate and encourage that action.

There are many “feelie” toys on the market that peak a child’s curiosity; however, you can make your own. A wire clothes hanger, strong and brightly colored, inch-wide plastic or cloth tape will get you started.

Bend the wire into two arms. Attach some objects (a soft brush, sponge, cotton string scrubber, for example) to each arm and to the middle of the two arms (see illustration). Wrap tape around both wire arms of the hanger and down the center hanging item. Leave the wire ends free from tape so you can change the items occasionally.

Hang this contraption above your child just within reach of those active little hands. For the next few months, your child will reach, touch, bat, contemplate and reach again. Soon your baby will grasp this toy. You will have a wonderful time watching this action too.

You can also make a mobile eye show for your baby. Hang a few items from a coat hanger. Use an elastic ribbon stretched across the room or from hooks you have inserted in the ceiling. Place the mobile where your baby looks and focuses. Rattles, stuffed toys, aluminum pie tins, old greeting cards, balls, photographs, measuring cups, or spoons will be interesting to your baby. Change the items and location of the mobile when your infant tires of the objects.

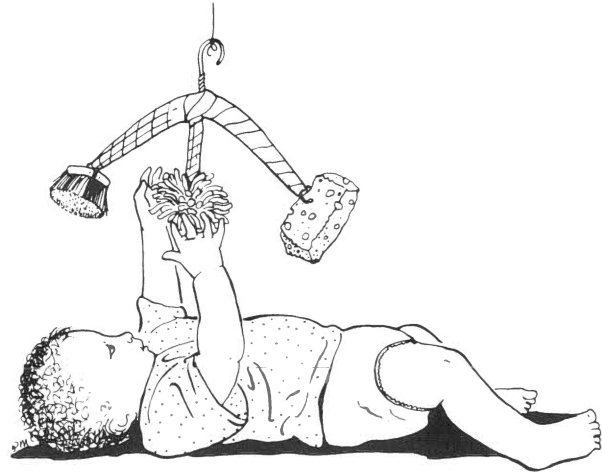
At this age, infants lie on their backs, showing a preference for one side or another. Some babies spend a lot of time turning from side to side. A temporary bald spot may form at the back of the head. Turn your baby onto his or her tummy to provide a different view of the world.

Infant seats are convenient for parents. Babies enjoy the change in view. With back supported and arms and legs free to wiggle, babies can participate more in your family’s comings and goings. Choose a seat that is solid and is deep. Then your baby will not slip out when the seat is upright. Always use a safety strap. Do not overuse the seat, however. Your child still needs your loving arms and the closeness of your loving face.

Large Muscle Development

Have you noticed that your child can bring the hands together to do some elaborate finger play? The large arm muscles are now becoming more flexible and controlled.

Your child may be able to roll from back to side, and sit up if you help. Sometimes, four-month-old babies get a thrill out of being lifted to a standing position. Lift them with your hands under their



arms. Their legs are not strong enough to support their bodies. Shaking or tossing baby can cause death or brain damage. Do not let go or toss baby into the air.

Special Message to Fathers

Fathers are excellent caregivers. Chase away any feelings of awkwardness or inadequacy about taking care of your infant. Share the tasks equally. Be involved in the fun and work of caring for your child. Fathers can play, bathe, soothe and dream along with their little ones. You do not want to miss the joys and special efforts of parenting. They are precious times you will want to experience first hand and remember.

The assumption that babies are women’s work and that children belong with their mothers is not true. Studies repeatedly show that men are every bit as capable as women in loving and caring for their children. Infants develop an emotional attachment to their fathers (as well as their mothers). In play situations children often prefer fathers.

Health Suggestions

Parents look forward to the time when babies start eating solid foods. However, nutritionists believe that breast milk or an iron-fortified formula provides adequate nutrition for the first six months. Ask a health care practitioner or nutritionist when to begin giving solid foods and which ones to give. Avoid introducing solid food too early. In another month, head control will be better and your baby will be able to indicate fullness by turning away. Also, allergic reactions to foods will be less likely to occur. Follow your baby’s cues to help prevent overeating habits that may lead to overweight problems in the future. When ready for solid foods, your baby will make chewing motions. The infant will drool and be able to hold up its head.

Remember: Do not prop bottles. Hold your baby. Talk to your baby while you hold the bottle. Bottle propping may cause ear infections. Also,

keep your baby away from smoke. Second hand tobacco smoke can cause serious health problems. Ask people not to smoke in your home. Stay away from places where people smoke. Child care homes and centers must be tobacco free.

Safety Suggestions

School Begins at Birth consistently encourages you to hold your child in your arms, except in a moving vehicle. The National Safety Council urges parents to follow these precautions when driving with children:

- Restrain all children up to four years of age in an infant carrier, car seat or safety harness of some type. A lap belt does not provide proper restraint. If you are holding your child in an accident, your child could fly out of your arms. Also, your body could crush your child if you are not properly belted.
- Never drive with your infant on your lap. It is very dangerous in a collision. It is distracting to you as a driver.

Special Note About Fabric Stains

Without a doubt, removing fabric stains is one problem a new parent faces. Almost all stains will disappear if you use the proper method of removal. Here are a few rules to follow:

- First try cold water. It will not set stains or harm most fabrics.
- Act fast. Treat the fresh stain as soon as possible. Old stains are hard to remove. Work rapidly and dry spot quickly to prevent rings.
- Avoid heat. Hot irons and hot water often set stains.
- Use a spot remover. Brush spots with light strokes. Do not rub or pour spot removers into a stain.

Removing Common Spots and Stains

Washable Fabrics

Urine: Soak in a solution of 1 quart warm water, 1/2 teaspoon liquid handwashing detergent and 1 tablespoon ammonia for 30 minutes. Rinse with water. If the stain remains, soak in a solution of 1 quart warm water and 1 tablespoon vinegar for one hour.

Vomit and Baby Discharge: Soak in a solution of 1 quart warm water, 1/2 teaspoon liquid

dishwashing detergent, and 1 tablespoon ammonia for 15 minutes. Rinse thoroughly to remove all ammonia.

Milk: Apply a few drops of liquid hand dishwashing detergent and a few drops of ammonia. Cover with a pad of absorbent material dampened with water and let stand until the stain goes away.

Fruits: Rinse out immediately in clear cool water. If spot remains, wash in warm suds. When boiling water can be used pour boiling water through the stain. If the stain is old, lightly rub glycerine into the stain. Let stand several hours, then add a few drops of light vinegar and rinse well. Launder.

Nonwashable Fabrics

Urine: Sponge with water. Apply a wet spotter and a few drops of ammonia. Press stain every five minutes with a clean absorbent material. Keep moist with a wet spotter and ammonia. Let stand until the stain goes away.

Vomit and Baby Discharge: Sponge with water. For delicate fabrics, apply a wet spotter and a few drops of ammonia. Cover with a pad of absorbent material dampened with a wet spotter and let stand until stain goes away.

Milk: Moisten stain with a solution of 1/2 teaspoon enzyme product and 1/2 cup warm water. Cover stain with a clean pad dipped in the warm enzyme solution and squeezed nearly dry.

Fruit: Sponge with cool water. Apply a few drops of acetic acid and let stand a few minutes. Sponge again in cool water.

References

- Gable, S. and Isabella, R. (1992, Jan-Mar). Maternal contributions to infant regulation of arousal. *Infant Behavior and Development*, 15(1), 95-107.
- Lester, B.; Boukydis, C.; Garcia-Coll, Cynthia; Hole, W. and Peucker, M. (1992, Jan-Mar). Infantile colic: Acoustic cry characteristics, maternal perception of cry and temperament. *Infant Behavior and Development*, 15(1), 15-26.
- Porter, R.; Makin, J.; Davis, L. and Christensen, K. (1992, Jan-Mar). Breast-fed infants respond to olfactory cues from their own mother and unfamiliar lactating females. *Infant Behavior and Development*, 15(1), 85-93.
- Seifer, R.; Sameroff, A.; Anagnostopolou, R. and Elias, P. (1992, Oct-Dec). Maternal-infant interaction during the first year: Effects of situation, maternal mental illness, and demographic factors. *Infant Behavior and Development*, 15(4), 405-426.

Oklahoma State University extends credit to Shirley J. O'Brien, Human Development Specialist at the University of Arizona, for the original development of the "School Begins at Birth" series. For more information contact Elaine Wilson, Parenting Specialist, Oklahoma State University.

Oklahoma State University, in compliance with Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Executive Order 11246 as amended, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and other federal laws and regulations, does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, religion, disability, or status as a veteran in any of its policies, practices or procedures. This includes but is not limited to admissions, employment, financial aid, and educational services.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Charles B. Browning, Director of Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma. This publication is printed and issued by Oklahoma State University as authorized by the Dean of the Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources and has been prepared and distributed at a cost of \$254.00 for 2,000 copies. #8255 1193 JK Revised.