

INFANTS (BIRTH - 1 YEAR OLD) AND TODDLERS (1 - 2 YEARS OLD)



Families play a critical role in helping to reestablish a sense of normalcy and safety for a child before, during and after a disaster occurs. Please take a moment to read through these suggestions on how to support your child.

MY MILESTONES:

(Levine & Munsch, 2016)

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

- **Our Bond:** My attachment to you as my parent or caregiver is developing in these early days and months. When you are consistent in comforting me, that helps me feel safe and secure with you. That feeling of safety will help me to feel confident in exploring my world and gaining new skills. Do not worry, you are not spoiling me when you help me with my basic needs like connection and attachment.
- **Smiling:** I may start “social smiling” (meaning that I really am trying to smile at you) around 6-8 weeks of age.
- **Mimicking:** It can be fun for me to “mimic” or copy your facial expressions, and this helps me to begin to learn empathy and to understand other people’s feelings.
- **Copying Emotions:** If there are other people around me that are showing an emotion (for example, other babies who are crying), then I may display that emotion as well (specifically, I may start crying, too) because I feel overwhelmed, uneasy, and unsure about why they are upset.
- **New People are Scary:** I tend to be afraid of strangers, especially because I want to be with safe and trusted people like my family. I may cry or scream when I am around new people, and that is actually okay.
- **Help Me Feel Calm:** I am comforted by having my family around, especially being held and snuggled.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT:

- **Sleep is Key:** I sleep a lot because that is when my body is growing and my brain is making sense of everything I have experienced when I was awake. I need 11-16 hours of sleep each day (between naps and sleeping at night). Please remember that, as an infant, I should not be placed on my tummy when I am put in my crib.
- **Strong Muscles:** It is important that I have tummy time (which strengthens my neck and back muscles), and eventually rock on my hands and knees, practice sitting upright, stand and bounce, etc. That all helps prepare me to crawl, walk, run, dance, jump, and more.
- **Walking and Running:** I will probably start walking around my first birthday, though it might happen a few months before or after, which is okay. Pretty soon (sometime around my second birthday) I may be running around and climbing on things.

COGNITIVE (BRAIN AND LEARNING) DEVELOPMENT:

- **How I Learn:** I am always learning about the world around me. For example, I am learning about our relationship when you play with me and soothe me when I am crying. I also like to “study” how things work when I watch people and things move around.
- **Routines, Please:** I prefer having routines for when I get to eat meals, take naps, have indoor and outdoor playtime, and go to sleep at night.
- **What I Love:** As an infant, I really enjoy toys that have contrasting light and dark colors (because my vision is not too good early on), quiet lullaby music, mirrors, people who have familiar scents

(yes, I do notice your scent), and soft swaddles and blankets. I really like playing with people the most. As a toddler, I love bright colors, musical toys, toys with buttons and things to feel, books, balls, and things that move in response to something I do (for example, pop-up toys where the figure pops upward after a switch is flipped or a button is pushed).

MY RESPONSE TO STRESS:

- **I Feel Your Stress:** Believe it or not, I can feel when you are stressed, sad, angry, or confused. Since I do not have very good language skills yet, I may show the stress I am experiencing by crying more, having trouble sleeping or eating, or being grumpy.
- **Change is Hard:** It is hard for me to understand why people are upset, why new people are around us, or why we are in a different place. When our daily routines and locations continue to change, this can make me feel stressed.
- **Attention-Seeking:** As a toddler, I might try risky (and sometimes unsafe) behaviors to get attention. I might seem to not listen to you and/or disobey more often. This is because I am trying to show you that I need extra attention and love from you.
- **I May “Regress”:** Some of the new skills that I have learned (like pulling up to stand, potty-training, talking, drinking from a sippy cup, etc.) may “regress.” In other words, I might act like a younger infant for a while. This is because it can take a lot of effort for me to retain new skills, and when I am overwhelmed, tired, or stressed, using those new skills can be too much work. This temporary “regression” is okay and I should return to achieving my typical developmental milestones within a few weeks or months.
- **Trouble Sleeping:** After the disaster, I may have nightmares or night terrors (when I may be only a little bit awake and scream or cry for a long time in the night). If I do, please comfort me, sing soothing songs, read calming stories, and stay with me awhile so I fall asleep again.
- **Clinginess:** I may be extra clingy to you and really dislike being separated from you, even for small periods of time (like when you go to the mailbox, to the restroom, etc.).
- **Play May Change:** As a toddler, I might show some behaviors (especially while playing) or pretend scenarios that are more aggressive than usual or that mimic the scary event that happened. If this occurs, please know that I am trying to work through and process the event in the best way I know how: through play. Once I feel at peace with what occurred, these play scenarios should become less frequent.

HOW ADULTS CAN HELP:

- **Routines:** Try your best to keep our daily routines as normal as possible, including when I eat meals, take naps, play, and sleep.
- **Safe Environment:** Please make sure that my environment is safe (outlets are covered, floors are clean, small and/or potentially dangerous things are not within my reach, etc.), especially if we are in a new place.
- **Have Patience:** Recovering from a traumatic situation is hard for all of us, but so are some of the normal parts of being a baby and toddler. Teething and growing are hard work, so I may be extra grumpy or fussy when either occur. Please be patient with me. Soft and cool or cold foods, teething toys, and sometimes some medicine (talk to my doctor first) can help me.
- **Positive Touch:** I really enjoy having hugs, back rubs, and infant massages. Those are very soothing and calming to me. You can even take a class in infant massage if you want to learn more.
- **Creative Expression:** Please provide me with opportunities for fun, play, and creativity (through art, music, etc.). I need those activities to help me express myself and make sense of what I have experienced, even as a toddler.
- **Be with Me:** I want to spend time with you while reading books, playing with toys, and singing songs. Give me extra snuggles to reassure me that I am safe and loved.
- **Familiar People:** Please try not to have strangers taking care of me, but rather, family or friends I know well. Now is not the best time to try a new babysitter, because lots of my life already feels unpredictable.

- **Be Honest:** As a toddler, I might want to talk to you about the disaster event multiple times because asking repetitive questions is one way that I learn new things. Please talk to me honestly but in an appropriate way based on my age. Please do not deny what happened or ignore the topic of conversation even though I am very young.
- **Offer Appropriate Choices:** As a toddler, please provide me with choices, when possible, because that helps me feel more in control of the situation. For example, allow me to select which stuffed animal I want to snuggle with, which book I want to read, what toy I will use, etc.
- **Stay Calm:** When you are talking with other people and I am around, try not to raise your voice or be angry with them, because that may make me feel upset and confused.
- **Watch my Behavior:** If my behavior starts looking like it did when I was younger, that is okay for a while (a few weeks to a few months). If, after a few months and we are less stressed, I am not regaining my advanced skills (like walking, running, talking, etc.), please speak with a healthcare professional.
- **Schedule Appointments:** Do not forget that I still need my regular well-child check-ups with my doctor and may need vaccinations in order to stay up-to-date.
- **Self Care:** Please take care of yourself. Rest often, eat nourishing foods, drink water, ask for help, and be honest with others about what you need. When you are well taken care of, then you can take even better care of me.

WHEN TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP:

- **Regression Remains:** If my immature or “babyish” behaviors (“regression”) do not stop after a few weeks or months (for example, I do not resume trying to crawl, talk, or potty-train), please talk to a healthcare professional.
- **Continued Sleep Issues:** If I have continued struggles sleeping at night (after a few months following the event), like falling asleep, staying asleep, increased nightmares or night terrors, etc., then I need help from a healthcare professional.
- **Play is Still Different:** If my play does not go back to being my typical types of playing (after a few weeks to months following the incident), please seek help for me from a healthcare professional.
- **Extreme Behaviors:** If my behaviors are becoming consistently more aggressive, moody, or irritable, even a few months after the incident, then please talk to a healthcare professional.

(All children develop at their own pace. These recommendations are based on scientific research and trends in child development. Additionally, the information contained here does not constitute medical advice. It is for educational and informational purposes only. Please consult with a healthcare professional to receive personalized advice or treatment for your child.)

REFERENCES & RESOURCES THAT YOU CAN USE:

- American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) - Tips on Talking to a Child After a Disaster (2018)
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KANprqSTX2k>
- American Red Cross - Helping Your Child Cope After a Disaster (2020)
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qA-csgFa8k>
- Caring for Your Baby in a Disaster (2016)
 - <https://www.marchofdimes.org/prepare-for-a-disaster-information-for-anyone-caring-for-a-newborn.aspx>
- FEMA Accessible: Helping Children Cope After a Disaster (ASL) (2017)
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=di6j1XxKC8c>
- Healthy Children. (06/2016). AAP Supports Childhood Sleep Guidelines.
 - <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/news/Pages/AAP-Supports-Childhood-Sleep-Guidelines.aspx#:~:text=Children%20to%20to%20years,basis%20to%20promote%20optimal%20health.>
- Levine, L. E., and Munsch, J. (2016). *Child Development from Infancy to Adolescence*. SAGE Publications, Inc.

- National Child Traumatic Stress Network (2012) - Parenting Tips for Helping Infants and Toddlers after Disasters
 - (<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/pfa-parent-tips-helping-infants-and-toddlers-after-disasters>)
- Stanford Children's. (2021) Infant Sleep.
 - <https://www.stanfordchildrens.org/en/topic/default?id=infant-sleep-90-P02237>
- Zero to Three: Coping After a Natural Disaster (Copyright 2020)
 - <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/1096-coping-after-a-natural-disaster>

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