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Understanding your Baby

The relationship with your baby starts before birth. Did you know babies can hear from around the 24th week of pregnancy and may move around to music? Watch more about this by looking at the films on the *Getting to Know Your Baby* website at bit.ly/SNYFfX

- Holding your newborn baby skin-to-skin can be a good way to feel close and get to know one another. This can be especially important if your baby is nursed in the neonatal unit.
- Newborn babies prefer your face, although most infants will only focus briefly. As your baby's vision develops in the first 2 months, they will be able to focus on your face for a greater amount of time and enjoy being talked to.
- Babies get reassurance and enjoyment from talking and singing. Give lots of pauses and, before long, baby will begin to take conversational turns and coo back!
- Every day your baby will move through different states of wakefulness and sleepiness. Every baby does this in their own way, but learning to recognise your own baby's pattern will help you to give your baby what they need in a way that helps them to feel cared for and understood by you.
- There are 6 baby states: 3 awake states (quiet alert, unsettled and crying) and 3 sleep states (deep sleep, light sleep and drowsy sleep.) Babies move from 1 state to another very quickly and not always in the same order. You can take a look at some short films showing the 6 baby states at bit.ly/1p9PWPW

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For additional fact sheets see www.ihv.org.uk

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The Start4Life Information Service for Parents provides free information and advice. Find out more at: bit.ly/1iC4rrO

iHV Parent Tips

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Babies in the quiet alert state are wide-eyed, interested and have a still body. You can interact with your baby in the following ways:

- When your baby looks ready, hold them facing you and wait to see if they make eye contact
- The very best activity for a young baby is looking at your face and listening to your voice
- Your baby will needs lots of time to respond, so pause and wait until they are ready to engage
- Babies often need to look away because too much interaction can be very intense for them. Wait for your baby to come back in their own time
- Try singing gently to your baby, then pausing and watching for their reaction, then singing some more (don't worry if you can't sing in tune - your baby will love hearing your voice and being close to you)
- Taking turns in interaction is really important for your baby's development – watch a film about this here: bit.ly/1p9Q8i9
- In the unsettled state babies may fuss, whine, arch their backs, wriggle and be more sensitive to light and noise. Sometimes babies may show they are over stimulated through physical signs such as hiccupping, yawning, sneezing, squirming, throwing their head back or even bringing up some milk. Babies who put their hands up to their face are often tired

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Babies in the unsettled state need a change of pace and might benefit from:

- A cuddle
- A feed - look for 'feeding cues' like lip smacking, sucking and 'rooting' (turning their head and opening their mouths - rooting is a reflex action in small babies and happens automatically if you stroke their cheek)
- A drink of water
- A nappy change
- A position change
- A sleep
- Cooling down or more warmth

In the crying state your baby will be active, often grimacing and crying intensely.

Some parents find that babies who have been nursed in the neonatal unit are very sensitive and may cry a lot at the beginning. Babies in the crying state need calming. Notice the special ways your baby likes to be soothed. For example do they:

- Like being held when you walk about?
- Enjoy soft singing?
- Like being close to you in a baby carrier?
- Have a favourite cuddling position?
- Like to suck on their fingers or a dummy?
- Like gentle rocking in the pram?
- Like to have eye contact while you gently ask them what is the matter?
- Sometimes babies like to be listened to in the same way as an older child who is upset.

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Babies often move from deep sleep into light sleep. In light sleep babies have rapid eye movements with fluttering eye lids.

They may make facial movements including sleep smiles and fussing sounds. In a light sleep state your baby needs:

- Time to wake or go back to sleep if they are in their cradle.
- Or to be safely cradled in your arms.
- Babies in the deep sleep state lie still and their breathing is regular and steady. It is hard to wake a baby when they are deeply sleeping. In this state babies need a comfortable safe place to sleep.

Babies are often drowsy when waking or falling asleep.

Their eyes look glazed with 'heavy' lids and sounds may cause them to startle. In the drowsy state your baby may like:

- Time to come to
- To suckle
- To hold a favourite toy or comfort object
- Babies' sleep cycles are much shorter so they often wake, feel distressed and need comfort from a parent. This can be a very exhausting time for parents. Research shows that infants whose parents respond promptly to their crying learn to settle more quickly in the long term because they feel secure in knowing that their needs will be met. You might find it helpful to watch this film which shows how a mother repeats the same routine to help her baby settle without distress – take a look here: bit.ly/1q4SZdC

Check out your local children's centre to see if they have any parent and baby groups running. You and your baby may enjoy an infant massage classes such as those run by the International Association of Infant Massage, bit.ly/1i1N093

More information:

The books below have lots more information about baby communication:

The Psychology of Babies
by Lynne Murray, published by Robinson Publishers.

The Social Baby: Understanding Babies' Communication from Birth
by Lynne Murray and Liz Andrews, published by CP Publishing.

Your Baby is Speaking to You
by Dr. Kevin Nugent, published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company

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