

BANANAS CHOOSING CHILD CARE HANDOUT

What Babies Need in Child Care – Birth to One Year

by Helen Neville, BS, RN

Each stage of child development presents different challenges for families and child care providers. This handout is one in a series of four which examine developmental needs in different age groups and suggest how child care settings can best meet those needs.

What do Babies Need in Child Care?

Warm, Close, Stable Relationships – One-on-one attention and intimate connection are the lifeblood of relationships. Close, loving connections are essential with caregivers both at home and in child care. Early, stable bonds shape babies' long-term trust in ongoing relationships. Ideally, a baby can remain with the same child care provider over a period of years, not months. The more hours in child care, the more important it is to minimize change.

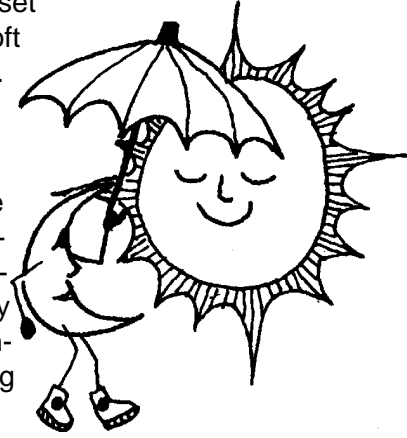
Positive Role Models – Eye contact helps babies connect with others. Babies copy the expressions they see on others' faces. As they imitate, they learn to *feel* the feeling they see. If they always see a tired, annoyed or overwhelmed caregiver, they have less opportunity to feel content, happy and curious. On the other hand, a relaxed, unhurried, cheerful caregiver with a calm face and a joyful voice helps baby feel calm, joyful and appreciated.

To Be Treated as Individuals – Parents and child care providers need to be able to:

- Correctly read the meaning of baby's sounds and body language. For starters, identify when baby has had enough – be it food, attention or stimulation. One baby might indicate she's had enough to eat by turning her head away from the breast or bottle, while another might chew, rather than suck, on the nipple. Some babies start to fuss or cry to show they are tired, while others might not display obvious signs of tiredness until it's "too late" and they experience a major meltdown. In both cases, parents and child care providers need to step in and make sure baby gets a rest.
- Determine baby's favorite ways to be held. Some babies like to be held on their tummies, some close to the caregiver's chest and some prefer to be held over a shoulder.

- Offer comfort at times of upset or fear: hold baby, sing a soft song, stroke baby's head ... there are many variations on this theme.

- Be playful (but do not tease or frighten): play peek-a-boo and smile when you reappear. Don't frighten baby by putting on a mean or angry face or by disappearing for too long.



- Encourage rather than force baby to experience new activities and challenges. Once baby accomplishes something new, enjoy and praise the achievement.
- Generally, move according to the baby's pace and attention span. Stimulation is important, but realize that babies, like adults, need time to relax and think about new experiences. Pay attention and respond to each individual baby's cues.

Lots of Opportunity to "Talk" and "Listen" – The more adults talk with babies, the sooner most babies will learn to talk. They need to hear clear, simple, repetitive language. Good caregivers talk about what is going on now and what will happen next, so babies can understand and imitate: "I'm going to change your diaper now. Here you go, up on the table." Then they continue to add new words as understanding grows. The high pitch and exaggerated tones of "baby talk" help babies learn the basic sounds of language during the first six to eight months of life. When caregivers copy baby's sounds, facial expressions and body movements, they build a bridge for two-way communication.

Youngsters generally learn a language better and faster when listening to native speakers who are comfortable in their language. It is easier for babies to learn two languages from two competent speakers than a single language if one of the adults hesitates to speak English for fear of making mistakes. When caregivers speak a language other than English, children have the opportunity to learn two languages at the same time. Most infants can master two languages without problems.

Considerations for Parents

When to Start Child Care – Separation anxiety is common when babies are between seven and 15 months. Thus it may be easier for little ones to settle into child care before or after this age.

How Can I Leave My Baby with a Stranger? – Don't leave your baby with a "stranger!" Check references carefully. Have a prospective child care provider watch your baby while you are nearby, observing how the caregiver interacts with your child. Does he or she smile at the baby, sing songs, look at picture books, hold your baby? Ask questions to see if you share childrearing beliefs. Tell the caregiver how you would like her to handle specific situations: when to put baby down for a nap, how often to change him, what to feed for lunch, etc. If leaving your infant with a family child care or center-based provider, it is equally important to spend adequate time with the caregiver and communicate your expectations clearly so you feel confident your baby is in good hands.

I'm Afraid My Baby Might Like the Caregiver More than She Likes Me – Little ones in child care need all the warmth and attention they would typically get at home. When you find a child care provider who offers that loving bond, consider yourself and your child fortunate. That's not to say that parents cannot experience feelings of jealousy occasionally. Remember that parents and babies can still build strong, loving relationships when they *are* together. Love, including baby love, is not exclusive.

I Have Trouble Attending to One Baby. How Can My Provider Care for Three? – When parents tend babies at home, they're often "multi-tasking," watching baby while preparing meals, doing the laundry, putting away dishes or caring for older siblings. Because the provider considers child care her job, she concentrates on that task, setting aside personal obligations, just as parents do with their jobs. Experience also makes it easier for caregivers to care for more than one little one at a time.

How Can a Provider Take Care of My Baby and an Older Child at the Same Time? – Parents of more than one child have managed this trick for centuries! In fact, many older children love to help entertain babies and younger children. What's more, children rarely feel the intense sibling rivalry in child care that they may feel at home. Sharing a child care provider can benefit both the baby and the older child.

How Will I Know if there Is a Problem? – Parents should trust their "gut" feeling when it comes to judging their baby's well-being. The same goes for judging the relationship with their provider. The great majority of caregivers are conscientious and reliable. Consult our other handouts – listed on page four – for information on how to search for, screen and interview child care providers. (Handouts are available at our office, by mail and from our website, www.bananasinc.org.) Most importantly, be sure to check references. Consider a trial period to see if you feel comfortable with the provider. Once care has started, you may want to drop in on the caregiver at unexpected times in order to reassure yourself that your baby is receiving quality care.



My Baby Cries When I Leave! –

About the time babies learn to crawl, they become more anxious when they are separated from familiar caregivers. Remember that humans used to learn to crawl and walk while out in the dangerous forest or jungle. Fear of separation kept youngsters from toddling too far from safety. Depending on when babies start to crawl, most begin to experience separation anxiety between seven and 12 months. About one month after developing separation anxiety, they may also develop fear of strangers. These fears are usually greatest between ten and 15 months and may continue in milder forms until age three years.

Even with a trusted caregiver, many babies cry briefly when parents leave. Usually, they settle down quickly and enjoy their caregiver and the environment once the parent is out of sight. Some babies, however, continue to cry long after parents leave. Or they may look sad, may not show any interest in people or toys and may even remain too upset to eat. Such babies need more time to get comfortable with child care. If this is the case, try to arrange your schedule for a gradual change.

Start by spending time *with* your child in child care. Give your baby a chance to get to know a new provider at home or at a new child care home while you are nearby. Tell the caregiver about your baby's body language so that she can more easily read the baby's signals. Then leave the baby for short periods, such as half an hour or so. Gradually increase the amount of time you are away until your baby is used to the new person or the new surrounding.

Considerations for Caregivers

Address the Needs of All Children in Care – Caregivers need to know how to respond to and connect with each individual baby. How can this be done in group care? First, child care providers need to learn each baby's language to be able to address individual needs. One baby may need to be held a lot and another may not like much holding at all. One may scream when hungry, another just whimper. Providers need to attend to both the loud, energetic children and the quiet ones who don't complain but nonetheless need attention. Make sure to check in with the quiet child when the other(s) are happily occupied or asleep.

Deal with Two Babies Who Need Help at the Same Time – Parents of twins and triplets have had to manage this challenge all along. An experienced caregiver may hold two babies on her lap, or carry one baby in a front pack while feeding another in a high chair. One good way to keep one baby happy while diapering another is to enlist the help of a favorite toy that holds the baby's interest. Special equipment can help: a double (or triple) stroller, for example, allows the caregiver to go for a calming walk with two (or three) babies at once.

But even the best caregivers can only care for a limited number of infants. That's why experts in child development recommend that a caregiver not care for more than two or three babies at a time. It's not that babies need full-time attention all the time; rather, all babies need *many* opportunities each day to build a personal connection with their caregiver.

Accept that Some Babies Need Longer than Others to Adjust to a New Caregiver – This is usually due to the baby's inborn temperament rather than the parent or caregiver doing something right or wrong. Youngsters who get easily frustrated, who are shy or need extra time to adjust to changes, often need a little longer than other children to feel comfortable in child care as well.

Care for Youngsters on Different Schedules – State regulations require programs to have plans to meet each baby's schedule. That's a challenge as babies, even those of the same age, don't necessarily eat or sleep at the same time. Some need to eat more often than others. Some babies give up morning naps sooner than others. Caregivers need to meet each baby's needs. However, caregivers can encourage similar schedules by offering food and naps at regular times. Another way to coax babies into napping at the same time is to tire them out through exercise and excitement at a playground, followed by a snack and a soothing stroller ride.

Assure Pleasant and Nutritious Meals – A special song is a pleasant way to announce meal time. Snuggle with babies while bottle feeding. Offer nutritious foods that are age-appropriate once infants start eating solids – rice cereal, mashed bananas, potatoes and carrots, apple sauce, yoghurt, etc. around four to six months. Let infants set their own pace.

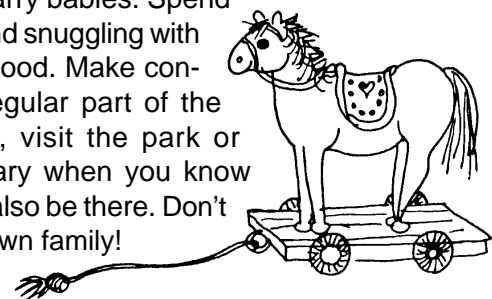
Solicit Special Security Items from Home – Young babies can't yet bring to mind a mental picture of Mom, Dad or Grandma. But a familiar blanket or stuffed animal from home brings back the *feeling of connection* that they associate with home. Encourage parents and relatives to bring these special objects to help their little ones feel more secure.

Use Age-Appropriate Discipline – At this age, the main task is to train the adults, not the babies. Babies don't understand what is dangerous or what will make a mess. It is the adults' responsibility to child-proof carefully. Once babies can crawl and walk, distract them, or pick them up and move them away from trouble spots.

Support Parents and their Relationships with their Babies – Tell parents something specific about what their little one does each day. For example, share with them that their baby enjoyed a particular song, was excited about the animals in the picture book or rolled from tummy to back that day. Help parents understand and appreciate each stage of development. Encourage parents to share both the concerns and the joys of caring for their baby. Our special note pad, "Daily Report Train" – available by mail or at our office – helps caregivers communicate an infant's day in care to parents.

Respect Cultural Differences – Be sensitive to the cultural beliefs and preferences of each family. Depending on cultural background, families have different ideas about many aspects of child rearing. For example, parents may have different beliefs about what solid foods are best for babies and when to start them. Listen as parents describe their practices and find ways to accommodate their preferences.

Take Care of Your Own Needs – Taking care of babies is demanding work. Be clear about what hours you are available to work. Pay attention to good body posture as you lift and carry babies. Spend relaxed time sitting and snuggling with them. Eat nutritious food. Make contact with adults a regular part of the week. For example, visit the park or storytime at the library when you know other caregivers will also be there. Don't forget to enjoy your own family!



Suggestions for Activities

The Environment – During the early years, when babies' brains develop so quickly, they need to have interesting things to watch, copy, reach for, touch, taste, listen to and smell in a relaxed, unhurried way. All these sensations and movements cause more brain cells to grow and connect with one another, enabling complex reasoning down the line. On the other hand, babies can also get too much stimulation, which can make them fussy because they are tired and overwhelmed. The goal is to find a balance of stimulation and rest for each baby.

Pay attention to whether baby looks and reaches for more or turns away to take a break.

The Caregiver's Role – The caregiver is often the most interesting object in any baby's environment. Ideally, in playing with babies, adults take the lead about half the time and follow and imitate what babies do the rest of the time. Take turns making faces and sounds. Help babies feel successful by offering activities that are interesting but not too hard. Remember that some babies get tired, frustrated or discouraged more quickly than others. Follow baby's pace.

	Baby-friendly Environment	Activities
All Ages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A quiet corner for the sensitive child who needs a break from the general activity • A separate sleeping area for those who need a quiet place to sleep • Some, but not too many, interesting things to explore • Comfortable places for caregiver and baby to relax together • Careful childproofing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nursery Rhymes – Humpty Dumpty, etc. • Singing and music games – The Wheels on the Bus, Itsy Bitsy Spider, Where is Thumbkin? (Loud background music or noise may distract babies from hearing and learning speech.) • Learning games – Pat-a-Cake, This Little Piggy • Physical contact – rocking, holding, bouncing on knees, stroking, snuggling, caressing • Baby massage, picture books
Under 6 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A safe place to sit and watch, listen and touch interesting things • Outdoor time for observing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let babies hold and manipulate toys, such as kitchen spatulas, wooden spoons, plastic dishes, crumpled paper, board books, etc. • Babies need "tummy time" while awake to build strong arms and necks • Let infants look at themselves in a mirror
Over 6 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe spaces for babies to roll around in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peek-a-boo, finger plays, nursery rhymes • Look at picture books together; point to and name pictures
Once Crawling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Space to crawl • Support (e.g. edge of a sofa) while learning to walk • Things to climb on, such as large pillows or bottom two steps of carpeted stairs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let baby play with objects which fit one inside the other, like a set of plastic bowls • Let baby roll and chase balls • Provide buckets and bowls to fill and dump with sand or water
Once Walking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A safe play structure, infant swings or other means to practice physical skills • Small table/chairs for eating and drawing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let baby pull toys (a box with a string) or push toys (a toy stroller with stuffed animals or a doll) • Let babies play in safe outdoor play space with sand box and infant swings

Related BANANAS Resources:

BANANAS has many handouts – available by mail, at our office or from our website – and videos for child care providers and parents. For a complete listing, see our publication and video lists.

Handouts:

- BANANAS Baby Briefs
- Child Care Issues for Expectant and New Parents
- Choosing Family Child Care
- Choosing Child Care for a Child with Special Needs
- Choosing Infant and Toddler Care
- Employing a Limited-English Speaking In-Home Caregiver
- Exploring the Senses with Infants and Toddlers
- Mini-Guide for New Parents
- Sample Agreement for Parents and In-Home Caregivers

Handouts (cont.)

- Separating from Infants and Toddlers
- What is Parent-Created Child Care?

Videos:

- Begin with Love
- Best for my Baby
- Finding Quality Child Care
- I Am Your Child: The First Years Last Forever

Books in our Reference Library

- Nee, Tekla. The Everything Baby's First Year Book, Adams Media Corp., 2002.
- Segal, Marilyn. Your Child at Play. Newmarket Press, 1985.
- Jones, Maggie. Understanding Your Child Through Play. Prentice Hall, 1989.