

Empathy Age 0 Summary

Why Empathy?

Your infant's secure and trusting connection with you is pivotal in its first year. You can lay the foundation for your infant's growing empathy as you interact and share love, conversation, and facial expressions.

Tip: Be sure you talk about anger at a calm time when you are not stressed or upset!

Tip: Intentional communication and healthy parenting relationships will support these steps.

**STEP
1**



Getting to Know and Understand Your Infant's Input

- If infants are uncomfortable, they may issue a less intense, short, whiny cry like "eh, eh, eh."
- If infants are in pain, their eyes may be closed or open for a second and look blankly in the distance. Parents and those in a parenting role often feel a greater sense of urgency with this cry. If it's gas pain, they may scrunch up their face and pull their legs up.
- If infants are scared, their eyes may remain open, their heads may move backward, they may have a penetrating look and an explosive cry, and they might suddenly extend their legs, arch their back, and then curl up again—an involuntary startle response.
- If infants feel angry, their eyes may be half open or half closed, either in no direction or a fixed location. Their mouth may be open or half-open. Gestures may accompany crying, and they may arch their back to show they are upset. The intensity gradually increases.
- If infants are hungry, they may produce a cry that sounds similar to anger or discomfort, depending on the intensity. Cries can be short and low-pitched, and they rise and fall.
- If infants are tired, they may rub their eyes with them closing and opening. They may pull at their ears and yawn.

**STEP
2****TEACH**

Teach New Skills

- Model empathy while interacting with your infant. Modeling empathy can be one of the greatest teaching tools.
 - Share the focus. As you spend time with your infant, follow their lead. As they pick up new toys or explore a different part of the room, they move, notice, and name what they are exploring. Follow your infant's lead. They likely will signal with a short cry or simply change their attention when they need to shift their focus.
 - Notice gestures and listen for thoughts and feelings. Attempt to figure out what your infant is trying to tell you through their sounds, gestures, and facial expressions.
 - Infants require your attention to thrive. So, why not build a special time into your routine when you are fully present to listen to what your infant has to tell you? Turn off your phone. Set a timer if needed. Then, notice your body language. Ask yourself, "What is my body communicating, and how am I demonstrating that I'm listening?"
- Ensure daily face-to-face interactions. When face-to-face with a parent or someone in a parenting role, infants increase their sense of security and learn about themselves and their emotions. Their numerous minuscule facial muscles change to mimic your own. Research shows that eye contact increases heartbeats in parent and child and helps the infant learn about others' emotional experiences.
 - Talk up close to your infant. Try to get down on the same level when your infant is in a high chair, crib, or stroller. Narrate what's happening around you or tell a favorite memory or story.
 - When encountering new people or situations, get on eye level with your infant and introduce them to those new experiences to help them feel safe.
 - Express love up close. Children need to hear they are loved at every age. Start now and get in the habit of assuring your infant they are loved no matter what.
- Hold your infant close regularly. Infants require close contact with their parents or someone in a parenting role. Skin-to-skin contact reduces stress and promotes immunity to disease. Heart rates and emotions sync up when infants are held closely.
 - Rocking in a rocking chair is a soothing way to connect and hold an infant.
 - Baby carriers offer a way to move about with your infant close to your heart.
 - Share the holding. Enlist other trusted family members or friends to share when holding your infant close.

**STEP
3****PRACTICE**

Practice to Grow Skills and Develop Habits

- Allow your infant to interact with new people of all ages with you close by their side.
- Create a consistent routine with regular nap times, play times, and meals. Routines create a sense of safety and security, so your infant can focus on learning and growing.

- Narrate your day as you do your household chores or run errands in your community. This narration will offer your infant a sense of connection and provide practice in some building blocks of empathy, such as listening to your thoughts and feelings.



Support Your Infant's Development and Success

- Learn about your infant's development. Each new age presents different challenges, and being informed about your child's developmental milestones can help you be more compassionate and patient.
- Recognize effort by using "I notice..." statements like: *"I noticed how you smiled at the new person we met in the store."*
- On days with extra challenges, when you can see your infant is scared of new people or situations, offer confidence in your infant's ability to face the unfamiliar. In a gentle, comforting voice, you can say, *"Anna is kind. You might enjoy meeting her."* If your infant still seems uncomfortable meeting a new person, honor their hesitancy and do not force it. This is an excellent opportunity to model consent.
- Actively reflect on how your infant is feeling when approaching challenges. *"You seem worried about going into this new store. I'll hold you so you feel more confident."* Offering comfort when facing new situations can help your infant gain a sense of security and face them rather than backing away.
 - You can also offer comfort items to help your infant face new challenges. *"Would your blanket help you feel better?"* Swaddle your infant, or you may use a pacifier to offer comfort.



Recognize Efforts

- Recognize and call out when things are going well. It may seem obvious, but it's easy not to notice when everything moves smoothly. Noticing and naming the behavior provides the necessary reinforcement that you see and value your child's choice.
- Recognize small steps along the way. Don't wait for significant accomplishments—like the full bedtime routine going smoothly—to recognize effort. Remember that your recognition can work as a tool to promote more positive behaviors. Find small ways your child is making an effort and let them know you see them.
- Build celebrations into your routine. For example, after completing your bedtime routine, snuggle and read before bed.

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