

Happiness Age 0 Summary

Why Happiness?

It may seem that the only things infants can do in these early months of life involve eating, sleeping, and crying. In fact, they are learning so much that your infant's brain will double in size in the first year of life. They are deeply engaged in building the foundational social and emotional skills to set the course for their lifetime. As a parent or someone in a parenting role, you play an essential part in your infant's success. There are intentional ways to grow a healthy parent-infant relationship from the start, and feeling happiness together is a great way to do it.

STEP

1



Getting to Know and Understand Your Infant's Input

- Consider how the distinct sounds of your infant's cries connect with their body language. It is okay if you are unsure or don't know what your infant is trying to communicate to you.
- Check out these common cues and see if they match your infant's feelings and associated needs.
 - If an infant is uncomfortable, they may use a less intense, short, whiny cry like "eh, eh, eh."
 - If an infant is in pain, their eyes may be closed or may open for a second and look blankly into the distance. Parents often feel a greater sense of urgency with this cry. They may scrunch up their face and pull their legs up if it's gas pain.
 - If an infant is scared, their eyes may remain open. Their head may move backward. They may have a penetrating look and an explosive cry. They might suddenly extend their legs, arch their back, and then curl up again -- an involuntary startle response.
- If your response to your infant's cues doesn't seem to help, that's okay. Test another response and see if it helps to soothe.

**STEP
2****Teach New Skills**

- Ensure lots of 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 feelings.
 - Talk up close to your infant. Make a point when they are in a high chair, crib, or stroller to get down on their level. Narrate what's happening around you or tell a favorite memory or story.
 - When encountering new people or situations, get on their eye level and introduce your infant 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 that they are loved no matter what.
- Hold your infant close regularly. Infants require close contact with their parents. Skin-to-skin contact reduces stress and promotes immunity to disease.
 - 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.
- Offer sensory exploration. Infants come to know and understand the world and the objects around them through all five senses -- touch, taste, smell, sound, and sight. Keeping safety and supervision in mind, place objects near your infant for exploration.
 - Infants in their first year of life can benefit from regular time on their tummy. Lay your infant down on a blanket. Include items within or, if attempting to crawl, just out of reach for infants to explore, including baby-safe mirrors, blocks, and board books.
 - Reading regularly with your infant lays the foundation for later reading skills and offers time for valuable connection. If your infant is able, allow them to choose the book and help turn pages to involve them in reading.
 - Offering time to explore water is wonderful playtime for infants, keeping safety and supervision in mind. Whether you provide a small bowl with cups on the kitchen floor or get into the bathtub, infants can exercise their hands and body movements while learning about water and play.

Trap: Don't expect a long attention span for any one activity. 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.

STEP
3



Practice to Grow Skills and Develop Habits

- Allow your infant the chance to take steps to meet their significant challenges, whether they are working on tasting new foods for the first time, exploring the objects in their environment, or attempting to communicate with new words or phrases.
- Provide opportunities for your infant to do more challenging things than they have done before. The goal is to come up with experiences that are just beyond what they are comfortable with so they can experience working hard and mastering a new skill. This may be a challenging social situation like playing peek-a-boo with a neighbor who they felt too shy to play with in the past.
- Creating regular routines that build your infant's relationships with others. A daily stroller ride around the block with a parent can become a cherished, comforting, connecting, and joyful routine.

STEP
4



Support Your Infant's Development and Success

- Learn about your infant's development. Each new age presents different challenges. Being informed about your infant's developmental milestones can help you be more compassionate and patient.
- Actively reflect on how your infant feels when they are doing something that brings them joy. You can offer reflections like: *"I notice you are making the Mmmm sound. You are smiling. I love that."*
- Don't move on quickly if your infant shows interest in trying something new. Children often need more time to stick with a challenge or pursue a goal. Be sure to wait long enough for your infant to show you they are competent. Your waiting could make all the difference in whether they can gain skills over time.
- On days with extra challenges, when you can see your infant is not feeling particularly happy, let them know that it is ok not to feel happy sometimes, and they are likely to feel happy again sometime soon. *"You seem upset right now. Let's change your diaper and see if that helps you feel better."*

**STEP
5**

Recognize Efforts

- Your attention is your infant's sweetest reward. Your recognition can go a long way to promoting more positive behaviors and expanding your child's self-esteem, confidence, and joy.
- Smile at your infant.
- Make eye contact.
- Use caring facial expressions.
- Be physically gentle and caring with your infant.
- Recognize and call out when all is going well. It may seem obvious, but it's easy not to notice when everything moves smoothly. If your infant is joyful, call it out: *"You are moving your arms and legs and making lots of sounds. You seem happy right now."*
- Build celebrations into your routine. Promote joy and happiness by laughing, singing, dancing, hugging, and snuggling to appreciate one another.

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