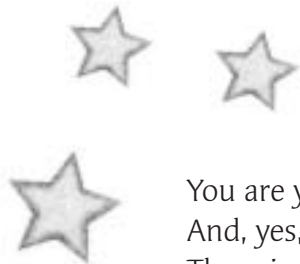


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You are your baby's first and most important teacher. And, yes, you are qualified for this critical position. There is no such thing as a perfect parent—you simply do your best. For healthy development, your baby needs to be loved, talked to, held, and allowed to explore. It's likely that not having enough time will be your biggest challenge. Make being with your baby your first priority.

# Introduction

Scientists now know that the very first years of life are critically important for healthy brain development. The environment you provide, especially in the first three years, has a profound effect on that development and your baby's future.

Because of this, *Little Steps* is somewhat different than other books you may have read on child development. The main focus is the development of your child's brain.

The many simple and enjoyable activities included here will help your baby's development in the early years. We also give you information to help you better understand how your child is developing. This understanding will help guide you in the upcoming years.

A loving and interesting environment will have a positive impact on your baby's future. Neglect and or being exposed to constant anger or stress will have a negative impact on your child's future.

Much of the foundation for your baby's future is being built in the first three years of life. These three years will, to a large degree, determine how well a child will:

- Learn
- Solve problems
- Express and control emotions
- Get along with others
- Form their attitude toward life

Fortunately, babies are very motivated to learn. They are curious and want to touch everything. They look for the chance to build their skills (and their brain). They will repeat and build upon a skill until they are ready to move on to the next step.

The good news is that the more enjoyable you make this time for you and your baby, the better the chance your child has of becoming a confident and competent adult.

Playing is one of the best ways for you to help your child develop. Simple play like trying to hold or grab a rattle is important brainwork for your baby. So is seeing you smile. Even touching your face is a learning experience.

Knowing that you are there when she needs you is one of the most important things you can do for your baby. She quickly learns that she's safe to explore and learn when you are there just in case she needs help. This helps her build confidence.

There's no reason to pressure your baby into learning something that she's not ready for or doesn't want to do—at least not at this age. We all learn best when we're having fun, enjoying ourselves, and when something is interesting.

It's a challenge for you to provide interesting activities and yet not pressure your baby to move at too fast a pace for her. Don't worry—you'll do just fine. Your baby will give you lots of clues. You'll find that you quickly become creative and patient.

Your baby is an individual with her own special talents and personality. Treasure these and help her develop into the very unique person that she is. This does not take expensive toys. It does take love, time, patience, and lots of hugs.

*WE CONTINUE TO LEARN ALL  
THROUGH LIFE, BUT IT SEEMS  
THAT THE EARLY YEARS SET  
THE STAGE.*

## *A Special Message*

One of the most frustrating challenges for a parent or a caregiver is how to deal with a crying baby. Sometimes a baby's needs are obvious and quickly taken care of. Sometimes you simply have no idea how to help.

Some of the most common reasons for crying are hunger, discomfort, or just being tired. Sometimes your baby really needs to be picked up and held, and sometimes he just wants to fuss. If your baby seems to be in pain, call a doctor.

Infants and young children need to be held and touched. Their brains need input and stimulation to develop, and they are eager to gain new information. By crying, they get this needed attention and food for their brains.

If feeding and changing your baby doesn't work, try waiting for a few minutes. Pat him on the back and quietly talk or sing. Place his thumb in his mouth. (Babies comfort themselves by sucking their thumb or a pacifier.) Hold him to your chest and walk around, and hold his feet so that he feels secure. Go for a walk in the stroller. Go for a ride in the car. Rocking chairs often work and are comforting for both you and your baby. Turning on the vacuum cleaner seems to quiet some babies.

Research shows that the best thing to do is to pick up your baby when he cries. In the first year, he will not become spoiled. In the long run, he'll learn faster how to calm himself—he doesn't know how to do this yet. Babies that are picked up soon after they start to cry seem to cry for shorter periods of time.

Babies cry often in the first two to three months of life and then this gradually declines. Some do cry more (and longer) than others. Many still believe that you should just "let them cry it out." Even as tired as you are, it is best to pick up your baby.

In later months, babies can become frustrated and get fussy when a new skill (or toy) is just out of reach. If this is the case, step back and wait a few minutes. Let your baby try for a while before you help.

Sometimes there is nothing you can do. Your baby is not crying to upset you. Many parents feel helpless, and some begin to feel angry. Some anger is normal, but if your anger begins to get out of control, put your baby in a safe place and leave the room until you cool off. It's far better for your baby to continue to cry than for you to get physically violent.

*NEVER SHAKE YOUR BABY. Brain injury,  
blindness, or even death can occur.*

*Never leave your baby with  
anyone who cannot control  
his or her anger.*

## *How to Use This Book*

**E**ach week spend a few minutes reading the activity and notes. Write your own notes in the space provided. Writing down what you and your baby are doing will help you understand your baby. And you'll enjoy reading and sharing this journal in later years.

Review past weeks often, and continue to use the activities as long as your baby enjoys them. Babies love repetition. It's one of the ways they build their brains.

Dads too will find that these activities are a great way to become close to his baby right away.

For parents who have infants with special needs, talk with your health professionals and Early Intervention Specialist to guide you in the best ways to get the most out of these activities.

Your baby will develop at his own pace. Don't be disappointed if he's not ready for an activity we have suggested. Not all activities will appeal to your baby. Follow his lead—he knows what he likes and when he is ready!



In the first years as genes and experiences blend to form a unique personality, the foundation for the future is being laid.





Baby's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_

Time of Birth \_\_\_\_\_

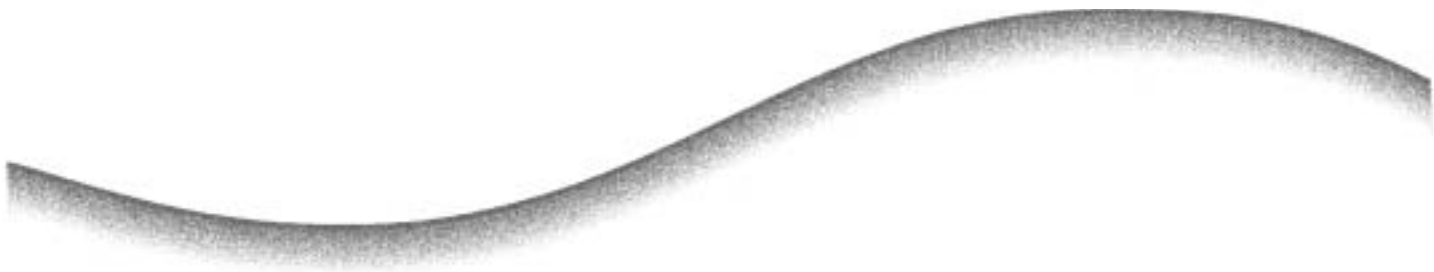
Hospital \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

Notes \_\_\_\_\_

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# *First Things First—Bringing Baby Home*

Every new parent feels a bit overwhelmed when they first come home with their tiny, fragile little bundle. Even people who have spent a lot of time with infants are somewhat anxious when they first bring their own baby home. The important thing right now is to make your baby feel comfortable, loved, safe, and secure.

Pick up your baby when she cries, and try to find out what she needs. It may be hugging and cuddling. Picking up a newborn each time she cries will not spoil her. It's important for her to learn that you will take care of her needs and that she is safe. When she is picked up often at an early age, it's more likely that she will begin to learn how to calm and quiet herself at an earlier age.

Feed your baby when she's hungry. At first, she may want to eat every one to two hours.

Talk and smile. Your baby can see your face, smell you, feel your skin, hear you, and can even sense how you feel.

## **Health and Safety**

Put your baby on her back when she sleeps. Make sure she's on a firm surface with no pillows or stuffed animals. Your baby needs to be able to easily move her head to breathe.

Keep your baby away from cigarette smoke. It's very harmful to growing lungs.

*Breast milk is the best food for your baby.  
Breastfeeding is new for both  
of you, and many moms need  
a little help. Don't hesitate  
to ask for it!*

Never shake your baby. This can easily cause brain damage and even death.

Choose babysitters very carefully. Don't choose people who are easily upset or violent. Find someone who has lots of time to cuddle your baby.

Loving care helps your baby's physical and mental growth. Neglecting your baby is both a physical and mental health risk.

Always read the information you receive from your health professional about your baby's health and well being. Ask questions even if you think they may sound silly. It's important for you to understand your baby's needs.

You need to be healthy too. Eat nutritious foods and drink plenty of fluids. Take only the drugs prescribed for you by your doctor. Rest or take a nap when your baby is sleeping.



Always put your baby in the car seat when riding in a car. Car seats save lives but most are not used or installed properly, or don't fit the car. Learn how to protect your baby.



# Week 1

As you begin this exciting journey filled with loving, laughing, and crying, you are probably experiencing many emotions and have many concerns. Don't worry. Mother Nature did a good job in preparing mothers, fathers, and even babies for this adventure. You may have doubts about this now, but you will gain confidence.

Getting to know each other can take a little time. When your baby is awake, cuddle and talk to him. He needs lots of love.

It's likely that your baby is going to want to eat about every two hours—both day and night, for awhile. Feed him when he's hungry. In between feedings, lay down and relax.

If your baby cries, pick him up and feed him, change him, or try to calm him. Picking up your baby when he cries will not spoil him. Let your baby establish his own feeding schedule.

## Health

**Baby:** Be careful. Babies' heads and necks are fragile. Always support the back of his neck and his head when you pick him up.

**Mom:** Many new mothers have “the baby blues” right after birth. Disappointment, sadness, crying, feeling tired, and worrying about being able to handle all of this is pretty normal. Overwhelmed is a word that often describes new moms.

## Feeding

After your baby is several days old, make sure he wets six or more diapers a day. This will let you know if he's eating enough. Don't let him sleep more than five hours at a time before feeding. If he falls asleep and you don't think he's eaten enough, gently wake him.

*Keep a list of questions  
to ask your doctor.  
Don't forget YOUR  
health, too.*





## Week 2



**B**aby talk is a natural way for parents to talk to their baby. Don't worry about sounding silly. Your baby will enjoy it, and it provides just the type of sounds she needs. You'll notice that most people will talk baby talk to your baby.

Your baby's eyesight will take awhile to develop. Right now, your baby can see things that are about 8 to 10 inches away (about the distance from her face to yours when you are feeding her). Things that are farther away are fuzzy.

Put your face close to your baby's face and smile and talk to her. You can start by saying anything. See how she watches and listens to you. Babies love to look at faces and listen to voices.

Tell her that you're going to pick her up and feed her. Tell her all the things you are seeing as you take a walk. Tell her how wonderful she is and how much you love her. Sing to your baby. She really likes to hear the sound of your voice and won't mind if you're not a good singer.

### Health

It's time for the doctor to see your baby for a two-week checkup. Bring a list of any questions you have.

*Carry your baby as much as possible rather than put her in a stroller. She's getting a lot more "brain stimulation" when she's being held.*

# *My Thoughts . . .*

Date

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Did you know that your baby is already learning how to talk? Every time you talk to her, her brain stores sounds that will one day be words. She learns to talk by listening to you and other important caretakers in her life.



# Week 3



**C**uddle and hold your baby often. This is good for his development in many different ways. It's especially important in the first years.

One way to have your baby close to you is with an infant carrier that holds him securely on your chest. Your baby can hear your heartbeat and feel your warmth. Plus, he will be close enough to see your face and hear you talk.

Dads are often concerned about how to pick up and hold this tiny baby. But it's important for your baby's healthy development for Dad to be involved. The sooner, the better. (Grandpas, uncles, and caring friends are good, too.)

Have Dad sit in a comfortable chair. Gently place the baby in his arms so that the baby's head and neck are well supported. Show Dad how to put his face close and talk to him.

## Health

Keep your baby away from cigarette smoke. Secondhand smoke is not good for adults, and is especially harmful for little babies.

## Health

Diarrhea can be a very serious problem for babies if not treated. Continue to feed your baby. If he won't take food, or if the diarrhea lasts more than 8 hours, call your doctor. Call the doctor immediately if your baby has blood in his diaper.

*Learning how to talk is an amazing mental accomplishment. Much of the foundation for this learning is built before age one.*



# Week 4

You'll be amazed by how much your baby will grow this year. Using washable finger paints, make a handprint and a footprint on the next page (or use one of the blank pages in the back of the book). Do this several times during the year.

Bath time is a good time for you and your baby to grow closer. She will begin to associate you with comfort and pleasure. It will probably be a little awkward at first, for both of you. It can be difficult to support your baby's head and neck and still bathe her.

Playing in the bath is a perfect place to learn many new things. Right now, simple things like splashing, feeling the warm water, and just being with you reinforces connections between brain cells!

Many babies enjoy a gentle massage after a bath. Make sure your baby is kept warm. Many oils and powders are not good for your baby's skin. Ask your doctor before using them. Talk or sing as both of you learn to enjoy this special time together.

## Health

Make sure the room is warm enough for baths. Put your elbow in the water. It should be warm but not actually hot. Don't poke anything in your baby's ears, and take care to keep soap out of her eyes and mouth. Don't add bubble bath to the water.

*Never leave your baby unattended in or near water, even if it's very shallow. Not even for one minute!*

