

## BUILDING HEALTHY FAMILIES

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### Engaged parenting promotes healthy brain development

Parents often genuinely want to engage with their children but time, stress, and feeling unsure about what to do with their children are common problems that inhibit positive parent-child interactions. According to Healthy Families New York (HFNY), engaged, responsive parenting can lead to better brain development in infants and young children.

#### Holding your baby



**Holding your baby for at least three hours a day is one of the best things you can do.**

According to HFNY, in the months that follow your baby's birth, his or her brain is developing swiftly in four areas: the brainstem, the sensorimotor cortex, the cerebellum, and the thalamus. "These brain areas will help your child to regulate emotions, breathing, heart rate, coordination, balance, and body movement," said Kevin Karpowicz, M.D. This teaches them about warm comforting touch and that the world can be safe and secure.

#### Wearing your baby

**Wearing your baby in an infant carrier promotes healthy brain development.** The baby will be a part of all you do and will be able to see your face and feel the warmth of your body. According to HFNY, pregnant mothers regulate their baby's basic body functions. In the months that follow birth, babies

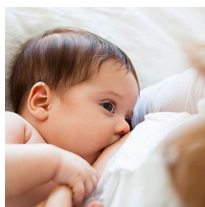
learn to regulate their body's basic functions, such as heart rate, breathing and stress responses. Babies are comforted by being in the "womb-like" environment created while wearing your baby.

#### Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding is another wonderful option that helps your child to grow a healthy brain. **Breastfeeding is good for the mother and the baby.** It helps to prevent depression in the mother and promote some much deserved feelings of relaxation. According to HFNY, babies benefit from breastfeeding because of the skin-to-skin body contact, soothing touch, and peaceful time of physical closeness. These elements help your baby's brain build connections that will help him form trusting relationships later on in life.

#### Doing the "dance"

Reading your child and knowing



when your child is hungry, tired, or bored is an extremely important part of

Building trust with your infant promotes positive connections in his/her brain!

#### Your Child's Healthy Brain Development Starts with You

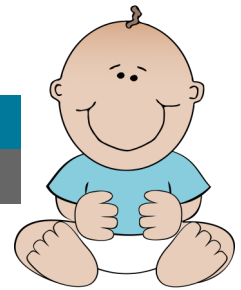
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providing responsive parenting. Experts call the caregiver's reading of the child's cues the "dance."

Here are some ways to "dance" with babies:

- Observe what is happening with the whole child (physically, socially and emotionally)
- Provide a secure and reassuring environment
- Give one-to-one personalized attention
- Stay focused on the baby
- Create consistent, reliable routines
- Provide choices and option that support babies preferences
- Wait for baby to respond during interactions
- Follow-up with an appropriate response based on baby's feedback

# Do you know how to “read” your baby?



| Babies State of Awareness  |   |
|--|---|
| Babies State   | Action you should take  |
| <b>Quiet Alert</b> (eyes bright and focused)   | Time to talk and play   |
| <b>Active Alert</b> (may be over stimulated, skin tone changes, splayed fingers, jerky motions, hiccups) | Hold calmly, talk quietly, take to a quiet room.  |
| <b>Fussy</b> (starting to cry, whimpering, dissatisfied, wiggling, needs help)                           | Hold or carry baby in a sling. Walk and talk quietly.   |
| <b>Crying</b> (not settling down)  | If not hungry, walk around with baby, sing, rock, talk softly. Put baby down, and walk away if you are frustrated.  |
| <b>Light Sleep</b> (squirming, easily awakened)  | If holding, wait until baby becomes limp and relaxed before putting down. Try not to disturb a baby in light sleep. |
| <b>Deep Sleep</b>  | Do not disturb. The baby needs to develop a natural sleep cycle.  |

## Activities that promote brain development:

**Read to your baby: Reading to your child is a great way for them to learn about the world.** Ask your child to point to pictures in a book. Name the objects for your child. Talking about the things your child touches helps him to learn the names of things he finds interesting.



**Massage your baby:** Babies experience the world through their senses, including touch. **Infant massage is an excellent way to give your baby experiences that help build healthy brain connections.** As a baby is massaged, different nerve cells and connections are affected which lead baby to associate pleasant sensations with a pleasant emotional mood. Massaged babies cry less and spend more time in a quiet alert state, in comparison to babies who are rocked. The massaged babies also fell asleep easier, gained more weight, and showed more positive mood with their mothers.

**Be active with your child:** Movement helps young children develop in many ways. **Being active helps promote thinking skills, communication skills, self-confidence, strong relationships, and healthy bodies.** Parents can provide tummy time for babies, dance, make an obstacle course, visit the playground, do “finger plays” like “Itsy Bitsy Spider”, take a walk or play hide and seek.

**Explore the world with your child! You are their first teacher!**