

# INFANT MENTAL HEALTH

Your baby's brain is a bit like play dough. You physically shape their developing brain. This process begins even before your baby is born.

What you do physically builds your baby's brain.

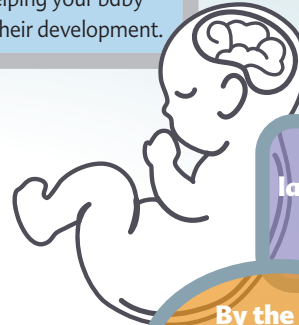
This starts even before birth.

Your baby will have lots of strong feelings, just like you! They can feel upset and frightened at times. Helping your baby with their feelings is really important for their development.

Your baby's cries tell you they **need you** to help them, just like an alarm.



Your baby needs you to **pay attention** to them and to think about what they are trying to tell you.



The first years lay the foundation for all that follows.

By the age of three, 80% of a child's brain is formed.



You might have heard things like 'leave them to cry...you'll make a rod for your back' or 'he needs to learn to settle himself'.

When your baby cries they need you to help them by giving **consistent loving care and attention**. They can easily become overwhelmed by their feelings if they are not helped to calm down.



Sometimes you might not know what your baby is telling you, but **responding and helping your baby to calm down** is important.



Cuddles, holding close, touch, rocking and talking help babies release **oxytocin**. This is a special hormone which helps them feel calm.

When you respond to your baby they learn that the world is a **safe place and that they can trust you**. This is called a secure attachment. It's a bit like you are an anchor for them to keep them safe in a stormy sea.



This helps them feel good about themselves, manage their emotions and form positive friendships and relationships as they grow and develop. They will also be ready to **talk, play and learn!**

Babies can experience **stress** when they do not have **a consistent loving parent** to help them feel safe. This can be so harmful that it damages the developing brain and has a lifelong impact on learning, behaviour and health.



Your baby loves looking at your face and into your eyes right from birth. Playing with, talking to and listening to your baby helps them form a **close and loving relationship** with you.

When you talk to your baby wait for them to respond back. This **turn taking in talking and listening** is a bit like a game of table tennis. They will show you when they have had enough. This is really important for building your **baby's brain**.



Continue all of this as your baby gets older. By the age of three, 80% of the brain is formed. This provides the foundation for everything that follows. By responding to your baby you are **building their brain and building their future!**

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