



guide to...

you and your baby



1

That first smile and laugh are just around the corner!

Babies start smiling and laughing much earlier than parents expect – smiles arrive in the first month or two, while laughter begins at two to five months. And you don't need to be a comedian to cause it – Dr Caspar Addyman (Birkbeck University of London) says that laughter isn't caused by a funny thing the parent did. 'Instead, the secret to getting more laughter is to give the baby more attention. What is the hardest thing in the world to understand? People! Laughter is one of baby's tricks for keeping you interacting with them so they can learn more about you.'

Tip: Engage with your baby and get rewarded in giggles!

2

Take good care of yourself...

Around 15 per cent of new mums, and some dads, have problems with their mental health before or after a birth. Donna Moore (City University London) says it is important for parents to educate themselves on the potential risks and symptoms. 'Many women do not get professional help because they fear they will be seen as a "bad mother". Seeking help is essential for recovery and means you're a *good* mother. If you have perinatal mental illness it's not your fault and with help you will recover.'

Tip: Get educated, get support and look after yourself (for more resources, see back cover).



3

Stay social

Dr Debbie Smith (Manchester University) emphasises the importance of social support for new mums. She said: 'Evidence reports that the type of support desired by women changes at different stages of pregnancy. Support from other mothers is desired after birth and the best way to receive this is to attend mother-baby groups.' A range of such groups exist these days, including baby massage and yoga. Dr

Smith says these groups can help increase confidence and attachment.

Tip: Try different baby groups: don't be put off by the group's name, as any can have wide benefits for both you and baby.





4

Dads matter too!
Dads have a hugely important role to play in encouraging their children to be individuals. Dr Anna Machin (Oxford University) says play is the start of this process, as your baby learns to deal with risks from a secure base. She adds: 'Engaging in rough and tumble play is a universal marker of the interaction between father and baby. Fathers love to encourage their children to run, climb and jump. But this behaviour is not just fun, it's integral to the development of the baby.'

Tip: Involve yourself in the fun and laughter of rough and tumble play every day, and watch the bond between you and your baby grow and grow!

5

Babies sort out languages for themselves
Plymouth University researchers Dr Caroline Floccia and Allegra Cattani study the emergence of words in two-year old children who speak more than one language. Dr Cattani says: 'Growing up and learning two languages naturally without attending a foreign language course looks idyllic, with good prospects for the future of a child. Children exposed to two languages usually begin to say their first words, in either language, a few months later compared to children learning one language. This is normal and nothing to worry about: keep talking to your child, in the language you know, they will sort the languages out!'

Tip: Talk to your child, whatever the language.

6

Help sort out your baby's sleep patterns
The clock that helps to regulate a baby's sleep develops at around four months and daylight is vital for setting it. Professor Jim Horne, from Loughborough University's Sleep Research Centre, says that for better night-time sleep, babies should sleep during the day in daylight and in a place associated with being awake. He added: 'Putting baby in its crib in a darkened bedroom, during the day, with curtains drawn and the house in a state of hush, prolongs daytime sleep, and shortens it at night.'

Tip: Sleeping in daylight with noise is good for later night time sleep patterns.



7

Cuddling is vital

Dr Ann Bigelow (St Francis Xavier University Canada) says that newborn babies are hugely sensitive to touch. After being held in the womb for nine months, holding can be extremely comforting for them. She says: 'This is why the practice of swaddling babies has been used for centuries to calm them. But most of all, babies like to be held. Newborns are great cuddlers and they like to have as much body contact as possible when being held, preferably skin to skin contact.'

Tip: Hold your baby to provide calmness and comfort.



9

Breastfeeding is a journey – plan in advance

Almost three quarters of women start off breastfeeding but this drops to around 47 per cent two months later. Pain, inconvenience, and low support from others might explain this. Sinead Currie (University of Stirling) says: 'You will almost definitely go through tough times on your breastfeeding journey, so planning in advance may help. Speak to others to get an idea of what to expect and think about ways to get



around any problems.' Dr Currie adds that services exist to help women who are struggling to breastfeed, but many don't use them. 'Most NHS trusts, local councils and charities have services for women to attend to support them with their breastfeeding, led by health professionals or peers. Utilising these services can provide women with advice, tips and support and ultimately improve the breastfeeding experience.'

Tip: Be prepared for breastfeeding, plan ahead and use the services available.

8

Babies love faces

Punit Shah (Kings College London) points out that, as they have poor vision, babies' senses may be overwhelmed by sensory input. He adds: 'However, research, pioneered by Professor Mark Johnson, shows that infants show an attentional bias for faces, which channels a wealth of social information into their rapidly developing brain.' This doesn't just help them to process familiar faces but likely contributes to the formation of the brain networks that govern social abilities in adulthood.



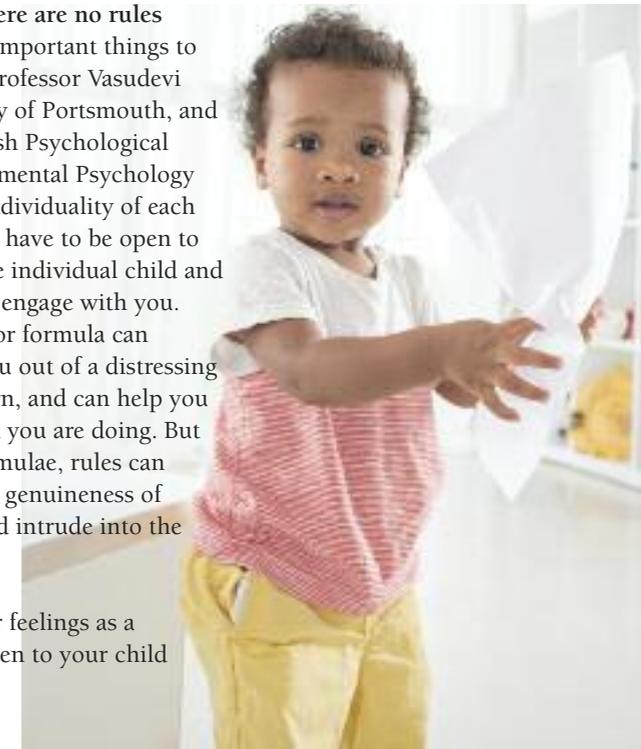
Tip: Babies look for much longer at faces illuminated from above than from below. Sitting with them below a light may help them to engage with you.

10

The rules are, there are no rules

One of the most important things to remember, says Professor Vasudevi Reddy (University of Portsmouth, and Chair of the British Psychological Society's Developmental Psychology Section), is the individuality of each relationship. 'You have to be open to engaging with the individual child and allowing them to engage with you. Using a "recipe" or formula can sometimes get you out of a distressing or negative pattern, and can help you to reflect on what you are doing. But if followed as formulae, rules can interfere with the genuineness of your response and intrude into the relationship.'

Tip: Respect your feelings as a parent, and be open to your child as an individual.



No 1 January 2016

Written by Ella Rhodes

Staff Journalist, The Psychologist

For more on fertility, reproductive health and stereotypes of the only child, see the January issue – available along with an online version of this guide via <http://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk>



Coming soon...

No 2: The Psychologist guide to... **leadership**.

For opportunities to contribute to and sponsor future guides, contact The Psychologist Managing Editor jon.sutton@bps.org.uk

Resources

www.nhs.uk/start4life

www.cry-sis.org.uk

www.pandasfoundation.org.uk

www.tommys.org

<http://tinyurl.com/psychmar2010>

the
psychologist



The British
Psychological Society
Promoting excellence in psychology

Discover more

<http://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk>

www.digest.bps.org.uk

www.bps.org.uk

Join the discussion on Twitter
[@psychmag](https://twitter.com/psychmag)

Anyone with an interest in psychology can join the British Psychological Society, from just £12: see www.bps.org.uk/join