



# My book of big learning: Babies



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[www.gotogrowtameside.co.uk](http://www.gotogrowtameside.co.uk)

# welcome to grow

Grow is here to help and support you with your journey from pregnancy to your child starting school, offering the most up-to-date advice for families in Tameside from services such as Health Visitors, Family Hubs and Midwives.

For more information about local services and support, including what's available at your local Family Hubs see [www.gotogrowtameside.co.uk](http://www.gotogrowtameside.co.uk)



@growintameside

## Welcome to the Grow learning activity booklet

Do you know your child is watching everything you do and say? They're learning all the time. Everyday conversation of what you can see around you, helping put the shopping in a basket or hanging up washing are all learning opportunities if you make them fun and involve your child.

Early years of life is an exciting time where close and loving relationships are everything – learning to talk and listen, using your body, developing

emotions, and expressing yourself as well as developing an understanding of the world around you.

This booklet contains suggestions for fun, easy to do, age appropriate learning activities. All activities are for children to share with parents supervising\*, guiding and nurturing curiosity. There are 3 types of activities **physical development, communication and language, personal, social and emotional development.**

\* Please ensure you consider any potential for allergic reactions to handling materials or substances and all activities should be closely supervised.

# getting to know you... early introductions

Babies learn through every contact and interaction. By supporting your baby to have experiences of safe, loving and consistent care you are helping your baby develop a strong basis for all future learning and wellbeing.

Babies and children learn through experience, connecting and learning through face-to-face interactions. Learning requires ongoing safety and security of their relationship with you.

Different interactions can support:

- Physical development
- **Communication and language skills**
- **Personal, social, and emotional development**

The booklet will help you to think about your interactions with your baby. These will be different depending on your baby's state, age and development stage.



# brain development

By giving your baby loving interactions you are helping them create stronger brain connections, helping your baby get ready to learn more and more.

By talking to your baby you are helping them to become familiar with speech sounds, to listen and be attentive and begin to understand regularly repeated words.

By being there and learning about your baby – what they like and don't like, how they respond to different things, and all their little ways – you are creating a strong bond. This bond will support them to manage life's ups and downs as they grow, and it will help your baby be more ready to learn.



# everyday

Doing all of the things involved in looking after a little baby can feel boring at times, but for your baby all these everyday things are new and so important.

By helping your baby feel safe, comfortable and loved through all the daily care, you are setting them up to trust others, themselves and the world. Then they can learn anything and everything!

# baby states

Watch your baby and see if you can decide which state they are in. When your baby is in a quiet alert state, get face to face with them and connect with their eyes – get to know your baby by watching their expressions closely. Try copying their expressions. Do they respond? Smile with your baby and notice what they do. When your baby looks away they might be letting you know they need a break. A few minutes is very intense for young babies.

**Watch your baby and see how they are feeling. Are they relaxed and looking like they'd like to play?**



**There are six main states that your baby can be in. Recognising them ensures you respond in the most helpful way. Knowing your baby's state will help you decide what kind of activity they might need or be ready for.**



## Quiet alert

They are settled and alert. Most activities in this booklet are for when baby is in this state.



## Fussy or unsettled

Have a gentle try at a different activity, move position, offer cuddles and comfort. Are they hungry or sleepy? It's okay for your baby not to feel like playing just now – everybody needs breaks.



## Drowsy

Try rocking, singing or cuddling activities.



## Crying

Your baby needs you, by responding you are helping them to learn they are not on their own with their big feelings. Even if they are not settling, you are being there and trying to help them. Your baby is learning about a safe place with a reliable adult who cares when they need help.



## Light sleep

Your baby might settle to a deep sleep or gradually wake.



## Deep sleep

This is the most important form of sleep and most likely when your baby dreams.

# peek a boo

## Here's how to do it

Playing peek a boo helps your baby understand that you are still there. Hide your face behind your hands and reveal yourself with a big smile! Play for a minute or two, longer as they get older.

## Extending the fun

Try hiding your face behind baby's blanket or looking in a mirror together.

## Your baby is learning...

...that you are a separate person and you are still there when they can't see your face.



# tummy time



## Here's how to do it

If baby seems calm and relaxed and ready to play, try placing a blanket or rug on the floor and gently placing baby on their tummy. Explain what you are doing and stay close so your baby can see you. Tiny babies might only manage a minute or two, older ones might love this position and want to stay here and play for longer.

## Extending the fun

As baby gets older you might want to bring a few toys close where they can reach for them.

## Your baby is learning...

...to use their muscles in different ways, to lift and turn their head. As they get older they will begin to push up on their arms, their bottom and move around the room.

# baby exercises

## Here's how to do it

Try some action rhymes whilst moving your baby's arms and legs gently. Try singing and moving the corresponding body parts at the same time.

Try singing a song or nursery rhyme that you remember from your own childhood or that you have heard other parents sing. Some parents feel self conscious singing to their baby, but if you can be brave and try it out your baby will love it!

## Extending the fun

You could look up some new nursery rhymes on-line and learn to sing them yourself – it's really important that your baby hears you singing the songs – try not to be tempted to just let them listen on line.

## Your baby is learning...

...to listen and begin to recognise and be comforted by familiar voices. As they get older, babies will start to control their movements, and will respond verbally or through movement to a familiar tune.

# create a cosy book area

## Here's how to do it

Lay out a blanket and some cushions, and get cosy. Your little one will love you reading them stories or describing pictures in books.

## Extending the fun

Don't worry if your baby is more interested in chewing or tearing the book – they are learning to be familiar with and enjoy books and that is the most important thing!

## Your baby is learning...

...the joy of books and the emotional security of special times with you. They will tune into the expression in your voice and the rhythm of text. They are learning to communicate with you as they respond with squeals of delight, bounce up and down in anticipation of the page being turned, and begin to point to pictures and babble.

The best time to join the library is when your baby is young. You can sign up to any library in Tameside and it's free. You can take out up to 20 books at a time. Spend some time in the library with your baby exploring books together.

There are also regular rhyme time and story maker sessions you can attend for free.



# bubbles

## Here's how to do it

Bubbles are always fun! Sit your baby on a blanket outside and blow bubbles for them, use keywords such as 'more', 'bubbles' and 'pop'.

## Extending the fun

When all the bubbles are popped wait to see if you get an indication from your baby that they want more. This might be by looking at the bottle, reaching for the bottle, making a sound, babbling or attempting to say 'more'.

## Your baby is learning...

...to share joy with you and feel comforted by you when the bubbles are gone.



# treasure baskets

## Here's how to do it

Find a box or basket for natural items that baby will enjoy investigating. Use a variety of safe objects made from wood, stone, metal, wool or rubber. You could also add pine cones, shells or feathers. Remember to clean the objects and supervise closely at all times. Sit and observe your baby.



## Your baby is learning...

...the joy of exploring different objects and materials using all their senses. They begin to concentrate as they look at, smell, feel, taste and listen to sounds. Babies learn a lot by mouthing objects as the mouth is more sensitive than hands and fingers at this age.

## Extending the fun

Create a variety of baskets for your little one to explore, you could add a lemon or lime. See our Sensory Sock idea on page 28 for a great addition to your treasure basket.

# bath and water play

## Here's how to do it

Always stay with your child when they play with water. Fill a bowl or paddling pool with water, or when it's bath time, sit with them next to or in the water and let them splash and explore it. Use keywords such as 'water', and 'splash'. Comment on their feelings like 'you like that!'

## Extending the fun

Add some props like a plastic mirror, or bath sponge for different textures. You can also buy play-safe shaving foam and bath friendly crayons. Even without toys you can't beat a good splish splash! How about singing a song or nursery rhyme you know while baby is in the bath – maybe you could even change the words to make it about the bath, splashing or water.

## Your baby is learning...

...that being enveloped in warm water and playing with bubbles is a sensory experience. Actions like blowing helps develop facial muscles which helps later as they begin to speak. They are experiencing how water feels, moves, tastes and sounds when it is being splashed, sprinkled or poured. Babies start to develop familiarity if baths become part of a routine e.g. bath, book, bed.



# tugging boxes

## Here's how to do it

Using an old cardboard box, punch some holes through and thread a piece of ribbon through each hole. Tie a knot at each end so baby can tug the ribbon but it won't come out of the box. Your baby will have fun pulling at the ribbons, from one side to the other and it will help with their grasping and finger skills.

## Extending the fun

Use different materials to thread through so your baby will enjoy different textures.

## Your baby is learning...

...to make connections in their brain between what they see and how to respond using arms to reach, and hands and fingers to grasp and feel.



# hide & seek toys

## Here's how to do it

Use a favourite object or toy, and cover it over with a cloth, scarf or towel. Use language such as, 'all gone', 'where is it?', and 'here it is'. Help your baby find the toy.

## Extending the fun

Use lots of language to describe what is happening and repeat.

## Your baby is learning...

...to explore and find out what has happened – to begin to understand that when an object is covered, it is still there. This does not usually happen until at least 9 months of age.





# nature walk

## Here's how to do it

Go for a walk and notice your surroundings with your baby. Point out all the sights, sounds and smells. See what your baby is interested in and let them spend time with things that get their attention. Share their interest and watch how they respond.

## Extending the fun

Let baby reach out and touch safe items like leaves, petals and grass. Simply being outside is a good way to engage baby's senses without overstimulating them.

## Your baby is learning...

...to listen to your voice and begin to understand and link familiar words you use to what is being pointed out e.g. water, duck, tree, etc. They are experiencing new sights, sounds, smells and textures.

# nursery rhyme time

## Here's how to do it

Nursery rhymes are great for learning to talk – make sure you're up close to your baby's face with lots of facial expression. Try classic rhymes such as 'Twinkle, Twinkle,' 'Wind the Bobbin Up', and 'Incy Wincey Spider'. You can sing any song, made up songs or songs you remember.

## Extending the fun

Don't forget to add some actions rhymes such as 'If You're Happy and You Know It Clap Your Hands'.

## Your baby is learning...

...to tune in to the rhythm, beat, and intonation in your voice, as well as expressions on your face and responses. By regularly repeating a rhyme they learn to anticipate what's going to happen and respond by showing excitement—vocalising or raising their arms for more.





# sensory crawl

## Here's how to do it

Collect a range of fabrics, blankets and materials that have different textures. Your baby will love exploring them with bare hands and feet and having different textures on their body.

## Extending the fun

Why not try this with baby wearing just a nappy so they feel textures all over their body.

## Your baby is learning...

...to move their body in different ways. They'll gradually find ways to move around by rolling over, pushing up with their arms and sliding backwards.

# exploring smells

## Here's how to do it

Find some clean old socks or sections of material. Fill them with different things with different smells e.g. herbs and spices, coffee or natural essence. Hold them for baby so they can learn about their sense of smell.

## Extending the fun

Use the socks a few times – can you see which one is a favourite? Try some different smells.

## Your baby is learning...

...to make connections to their brain through their sense of smell, touch and sight. They will begin to recognise familiar smells. Remember, they are very sensitive to smells so do not overload.





# mark making

## Here's how to do it

Yogurt, jelly or cornflour can be used as a safe way to explore mark making – the early skills needed for writing and drawing. It's a good idea to keep them in a vest and have a bowl of water ready for cleaning up. Better still, you could do it outside if it's warm.

## Extending the fun

Add colour by using food colouring and add utensils.

## Your baby is learning...

...to enjoy the sensory experience of wiggling fingers and feeling different textures. Eventually, this will become more deliberate. After the age of one, your baby may like to hold a chunky crayon and discover that by moving the crayon on some paper, something new happens. You'll be witnessing early writing skills developing.

# play safe moon sand



## Here's how to do it

For older babies, mix 2 tablespoons of oil with food colouring and mix well until you get the right consistency. Make sure the colour is strong. Add to flour and mix well with your hands. Allow your baby to explore the texture and make their marks in the sand.

## Extending the fun

Add tools to make marks on the sand – containers can be used for scooping. Use words such as 'squishy' and 'squashy' as they explore the mixture. Do they respond with their own chatter?

## Your baby is learning...

...to explore textures with their senses. This sort of experience encourages baby to gain strength in the tiny muscles in their hands as they squeeze, pinch and poke the mixture.

# shaving foam play



## Here's how to do it

Put a small amount of shaving foam into a shallow tray and spread it out. Let your child explore the texture of the foam and make marks in it.

## Extending the fun

Use tools such as spoons, sticks or brushes. Add food colouring to change the colour of the foam – what happens if you mix two colours together? Be careful your baby doesn't swallow the foam – look for play safe foam in your supermarket.

## Your baby is learning...

...to hold a tool and control their movements. This is good practice which develops early skills required for drawing and writing.

# dance dance dance



## Here's how to do it

Dance to a variety of music, modelling different dance moves to your little one. Why not have a slow dance to some country music or choose faster music to really get your body moving.

## Extending the fun

Encourage your little one to join in and congratulate them! Can they copy your moves? Maybe you could copy them.

## Your baby is learning...

...to move their bodies in different ways. As they develop, they will begin to remember certain points in the music where they should clap, wave or turn around.

# outdoor sensory play



## Here's how to do it

The outdoors is filled with new things to explore and stimulate your baby's senses. Let baby crawl around in new terrains – grass, dirt, sand, leaves, etc. Let them pick up new materials – rocks, sticks, sand or mud. Just keep a careful eye on them to make sure they don't put anything in their mouths.

## Extending the fun

Use some basic tools such as sticks or wooden spoons to explore sand and mud. Copy the sounds you hear – birds chirping, wind rustling leaves, water, ducks quacking.

## Your baby is learning...

...to use all their senses – new smells, sights, sounds, touch. Just be careful of them trying taste. They will begin to recognise sounds you make and try to copy. Being outdoors, you are supporting your baby's all-round learning and development.

# ball play



## Here's how to do it

Balls of different sizes are really good for babies to push around and watch bounce. Outside is the perfect place because there is nothing to hit and plenty of space.

## Extending the fun

Sit opposite each other closely and push a ball to play – can they give it or push it back to you? Explain to your baby who has the ball and talk about taking turns.

## Your baby is learning...

...that it's fascinating watching the way balls move in different ways. As you roll a ball towards them, they will try to move their body to get to it. This helps your baby develop their physical skills as they learn to move around. They also begin to understand some instructions, such as 'my turn', and 'your turn'.



# did you know...

our brains grow fastest  
in the first 3 years of life

