

UN-L for Families

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SW 4 Counties

Chase-Dundy-Hayes-Hitchcock

Understanding Developmental Milestones Important for Parents

There are many developmental milestones regarding what to expect of a newborn as he or she ages. Each stage is important.

It's never too early to read to a baby even prenatally, recommends Tonia Durden, Extension Specialist. As a matter of fact, hearing, tasting and smelling are among the earliest senses to develop. As a parent reads to baby, he or she learns different sounds and begins to build vocabulary. Playing music to connect to a baby's mood is important, too. When the baby is sleeping, play soothing music, when happy, play peppy music.

Parents of a newborn should talk to the baby from birth to age 1 in a soothing and calm voice to stimulate the baby, especially when the baby is awake. Another way to help babies distinguish language and sound is to vary voice levels when talking to them. Variations between low, high and normal trigger the brain, aiding in brain development. This also allows the baby to associate the different tones and voices with different people.

Once babies reach the age of 3 to 5 months, they begin to make sounds. Parents should respond immediately to those sounds by repeating them or adding words to help them learn the language and its purpose. A child's first language is crying, which is a survival language. When children begin to speak, it's important to repeat what they say with the actual word. If a child says "baba" for bottle, parents should model the correct language by saying "yes, bottle."

Babies understand more than they can verbalize. When they are toddlers, children begin to internalize relationships like how mom interacts with dad, to stress or to happiness. Therefore, age 2 to 3 is a critical developmental period for young children because research suggests during this time they are adopting certain social referencing behaviors that will later evolve in early adolescence and adulthood. Parents need to be good social role models because a child is learning how to be a good friend, socially responsible and a good worker, from the very early years of life.

Children develop strong bonds to their caregivers, so it's important for parents to spend time holding and cuddling a baby. Pay attention to the baby's preference because some prefer different types of cuddling, like hugging or singing or just being near to the parent. It's also important for parents to make sure the baby is safe at all times. At the ages of 1 to 2-and-a-half, safety is a huge concern because the baby is becoming more mobile and very sensory oriented. Babies are natural explorers, so they enjoy putting things in their mouths. They have very good, fine motor skills and are able to use their fingers well. They can pick up little pieces of lint from the floor or pennies or bugs. Parents and caregivers should be cautious as babies are learning to crawl and move around. Toddler-proof the home accordingly because toddlers can get into dangerous household products if they are reachable, so putting safety latches on cabinets is a good decision.

For more information on child and youth development and parenting skills contact your local UN-L Extension office or on the web at www.extension.unl.edu/child-youth. UNL Extension is committed to helping Nebraskans know how—and know now.