

Social and emotional milestones are often harder to pinpoint than signs of physical development. This area emphasizes many skills that increase self-awareness and self-regulation.

Your Child's Social Development

Social behavior begins very early in the lives of human beings. Infants respond to people almost from the moment of birth. In fact, if you began the bonding process with close skin contact immediately after your baby was born; you probably felt that she was definitely aware of you, reaching out to you. Newborns are attracted to human faces and they like the sound of human voices, especially female voices. Soon your new baby's eyes will follow your movements in a room, then her head will turn to watch you. At three or four months, your baby will respond happily to smiling people, then will smile at the sight of any approaching face. The baby will smile-you will smile-her smile will broaden. Thus, social interaction begins; the baby has learned to get a reaction from another person. She will even try to mimic you when you stare, stick your tongue out, or make faces. One day, you will notice that your baby quiets if you speak or sing as you come near the crib. It won't be long until she will make a sound in response to your voice.



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At five to eight months old, your baby will probably be learning how to be "cute," how to get your attention by pretending to cough or doing something that has made you laugh before. She will know the difference between familiar people and strangers and may show fear of strangers. When your baby is somewhere between the ages of eight months and a year, you'll be getting

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cooperation in the singing games and finger plays with which you've been entertaining her. Soon she will adore having an audience and will delight in performing the "bye-bye" ritual and any others that get attention.

Between the ages of one and three, your child will be ready to branch out socially. Though learning to actually play with other children effectively will take a while, she will want to be around them, if only as an observer. She will learn a great deal from this observation.

First Social Set: The Family

The immediate family-mother, father, siblings, and a care-giver, if the baby has some kind of daycare-is your baby's first social set, a select and fortunate group. All of you will outdo yourselves to entertain and please the baby, and your greatest

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thrills will come when he responds and reciprocates. Remember, though, that the key word in all human behavior is unique. Your baby is as different from all the other babies in the world as each snowflake is different from all others. Antics that sent your older child or your highboy's child into paroxysms of giggles and gurgles may very well make this baby cry and pull back. Take your cue from your child, if he startles easily or seems frightened by your loud noises, funny faces, or sudden actions, ease up.

At about a year, your child will be extremely sociable. He will love being part of any and every family gathering and will obviously adore everyone. Your baby will happily go on your rounds of shopping and errands with you, pay and receive social visits with you, and thoroughly enjoy just being with you around the house. Anything goes, in fact, as long as a family member is close at hand.

Unfortunately, things will change. The push toward independence you've read and heard about become reality, and at a point somewhere around eighteen months, your baby will appear to have outgrown any need for you. He will barely acknowledge your presence in daily life, except to say no a great deal.

Walking, running, climbing stairs, exploring, and satisfying curiosity about everything and anything will be all engrossing. There will be occasional reversions to the old baby ways of love and play, but in general the child of this age is concentrating so hard on self and environment that adults seem to exist for no reason other than to

satisfy his desires. The exception to this behavior will be when there's trouble, no one but mommy or the primary, daily caregiver can handle a cut or a bruise or make a stubborn toy work the way it should.

Sociability will return in time, but by the time it does, your baby's social set will include playmates and others outside the family. You will never again be as all-important to your child as you were for the first year, which is as it should be. Learning to let go is among the most important of parents' lessons.