

All babies are unique and meet milestones at their own pace. Developmental guidelines simply show what your baby has the potential to accomplish — if not right now, then soon. If your baby was premature, keep in mind that kids born early usually need a bit more time to meet their milestones. If you have any questions at all about your baby's development, ask your healthcare provider.

Four to Five Months

Special Smiles



Special smiles just for parents begin appearing at four months. A smile will spread across your baby's face when he sees you, but not at anyone else. This behavior implies not only recognition of you—a cognitive skill—but also recognition of your specialness—a social skill. This, of course, produces an incredibly strong emotional response from you. It makes it more fun for you to be with your baby and to play with him. In fact, it may be hard for you to pull yourself away to do household chores or return to work. This, in turn, brings great benefits to your baby, providing him with two ready playmates to teach him the many things he needs to learn.

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Babbling and Cooing

Isn't it wonderful to hear a baby beginning to make sounds, to coo and babble as you jiggle him up and down? Your baby's babbling and cooing evoke a strong response from you, just as his smiling does. Your play begins to take on a real conversational quality. Now each of you is more likely to take a turn—you respond to your baby's cooing with words and funny faces, and your baby answers with more cooing and babbling.

Laughing

BABY GIFTS & GIFT BASKETS

Your baby is easily distracted now, and feedings can become frustrating as she stops to watch a sibling or respond to an outside noise. You might try to minimize distractions by feeding her in a quiet, dimmed room.

[Baby Gifts and Gift Baskets](#) provides timely and practical information for new moms, as well as gift ideas for pregnancy, baby showers, and to celebrate birth:

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Some babies begin to laugh even before four months, some as early as five weeks. Laughing occurs about a month after your baby first smiles. A sudden, intense [perhaps surprising] stimulus can make a baby laugh.

But you may notice that sometimes your baby is not sure whether to laugh or cry. Laughter appears to be an emotion on the cutting edge of fear. Theories regarding laughter suggest that babies laugh at things that are almost, but not entirely, understandable to them. Things that are too confusing, however, will make them

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cry. Four to six months olds tend to laugh more at things that touch them [like tickling] and talk to them [like you saying silly things].

Your baby's laughing helps form an emotional link between the two of you, making your play a lot of fun. We like to see babies laugh, so we repeat whatever we did to get them laughing again. By doing this, your baby is learning to gain some control over his environment. Through laughing, babies can also learn the kind of effect they have on other people.

Feeding and Sucking

By four months, in all probability, either your baby has found his fingers or thumb to suck on in between feedings or you have offered him a pacifier. Several factors may influence the amount of time your baby spends sucking just for fun. More sucking is likely to occur particularly with breast-fed babies, when you begin to wean your baby. [Oftentimes, weaning is more difficult for the mother than the baby. That special dependency relationship may be difficult to leave behind.]

When teeth begin to erupt, you may see your baby chew more on hands, fingers, and any available toys. Weaning and teething frequently take place simultaneously because of baby's biting.

Most babies like to suck on something between and during meals. If babies have the good fortune to find their own thumbs-some do this as early as three weeks-they may be able to calm themselves down. Nonnutritive sucking [sucking for pleasure and not for nutrition] is one of your baby's first means of exploration. Babies use their mouths for exploring the world by touching and tasting all sorts of things.

People used to think that the amount of sucking their babies did would have lasting effects on their personalities and behavior patterns. For example, some thought that babies that didn't suck enough because of bottle feeding [or because the holes in the

nipples were running too fast] would grow up to have "oral" personalities and would be thumb-sucking school age children and smoking adolescents.

These early theories have not been upheld. How babies were fed or weaned makes little difference in their later personality development. Frequent sucking also doesn't seem to have any effect on emotional development [or on dental development, until the permanent teeth start coming in], so there's no need to continually remove your baby's thumb from his mouth or deny him a pacifier. In fact, it is impossible to keep babies from sucking when they want to; some babies will even suck when they have nothing in their mouths.

The upshot of professional studies is that a child's emotional development stability is not related to how she was fed. Also, weaning has not been found to have long-term, resounding ill effects, either psychological or physical, on well-fed babies. Rather, such issues as parental warmth, maternal responsiveness, and the level of conflict in the home are related to development of secure relationships.

Problems in Interaction

By as early as four months, your baby is beginning to develop a specific relationship with you. Your patterns of play with your baby help you to form a lasting bond. But problems can occur in parent-baby play.

Problems in interaction can best be viewed as a breakdown in the play sequence—a misstep in the dance—such as mutually [a back and forth togetherness] and turn-taking are inhibited. Sometimes the break is obvious to all concerned—as in child neglect and abuse. More often, problems may be very subtle and can be identified only through frame-by-frame analysis of videotapes of parents with their babies. Some parents and babies show a beautiful rhythmicity and "dance" in their play, while others appear "out of step." The misstep appears when what you expect to happen next just doesn't happen. An example of this kind of misstep is seen with a mother who turns away just as her baby starts to smile at her. Problems can arise because the baby isn't learning he can control his mother's behavior through appropriate social behaviors of his own. Psychologists would say that the partners in such an interaction are "noncontingent"—that is, one partner's response has nothing to do with the other partner's signal. Babies experiencing this type of interaction can "learn helplessness" no matter what their signal is, they are unable to adequately control their environment [in this example, the mother's response]. For this reason, it is essential that all parents react sensitively to their babies' signals.

Another problem may occur if one partner in the interaction is overwhelming. Some parents "turn off" their babies by working too hard to sustain their attention. If, for example, a mother continues to intrude on her baby, moving closer and trying to coax a smile, even though the baby signals that she doesn't want to play, the mother is dominating the interaction by not allowing her baby a chance to be an equal partner.

There can also be a problem with the match between the personality style of the parent and the activity level of the baby.

Unfortunately, there are no set rules or easy answers for the "right way" to play with your baby, except to be sensitive to your baby's particular characteristics. Some babies are far more difficult to parent than others. Sometimes, just knowing why

babies respond in the way that they do is enough to free parents from any misgivings they may be having and help them get back on the right track. The best advice you may ever receive as first time parents is to relax, have fun, and enjoy your baby¹

Recognizing Your Child's Uniqueness

Every baby is different. Some of these differences come from you and the kind of environment you provide. But some of these differences seem to come with the baby at birth. One of these inborn differences is in his temperament or behavioral style- that is, whether a child is "easy" or "difficult" or "slow to warm up." Considering temperament is important because, unfortunately, gross mismatches occur occasionally between the temperaments of parents and their infants. These parents are bound, therefore to "go against the grain" when trying to set limits for their children.

An "easy" baby shows biological regularity [in feeding, sleeping, and eliminating], predictable behavior, and adaptability. Almost any parent finds this kind of baby easy to get along with because she quickly adjusts to parental routines and expectations.

The "difficult" child, on the other hand, withdraws from new situations, has negative and intense moods, and adapts slowly. Although some parents take great pleasure in this type of baby, describing their baby's difficultness as "vigor" and "lustiness," more frequently, parents and teachers of "difficult" children feel threatened, anxious, and inept. If yours is such a child, it is important to keep in mind that your baby's personality is probably not your fault. A difficult baby's temperament often exists independent of parental attitudes and of management techniques.

Although, the "slow to warm up" child is somewhere in the middle, this baby sometimes causes more confusion for parents than either the "easy" or the "difficult" baby. These babies may be frustrating because their behavior is often so unpredictable. At times they are a joy to be with, but changes in routine seem to throw them, causing great difficulty for their parents.

Your child's temperament influences the behavior and attitudes of peers, siblings, children, parents, and teachers. How your child "fits" with these significant people in his daily life will dictate his patterns of adjustment to new situations. If you think that a poor "fit" may be detracting from your baby's opportunities for growth and development, you might ask your pediatrician about the parental-infant programs in your community. Parent-infant educators can often suggest some techniques to help make parenting easier.