

How active your baby has become! He is learning about shapes and textures. Your six to eight month old is curious and exploring, and needs you to watch him carefully.

Six to Twelve Months

Face Recognition



By seven months, your baby may have begun to respond differently to different people. This happens as babies sharpen their visual perceptual skills and learn to recognize people by their faces, by seeing either a full face or a profile. Face recognition is a gradual progress acquired over the first eight months of life. Some babies can read their parent's facial expressions too, because they are able to see subtle differences in faces. As with many developmental acquisitions, visual discrimination and perception of faces help your baby to maintain contact with you.

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Stranger Anxiety

By six months, [sometimes earlier], your baby may have developed a very clear and strong preference for one parent or the other. This presence is exemplified by your baby's crying and clinging to you as a new adult approaches—"stranger anxiety." Babies in our culture often show at least some form of stranger anxiety.

One baby who had to be hospitalized for a short period of time quickly learned to cry hysterically at all people in blue coats because some of them were doctors and nurses who were sticking him with needles. Just think how much cognitive processing occurred inside the baby's head for him to make those associations.

BABY GIFTS & GIFT BASKETS

Your six to eight month old is now on-the-move and can quickly get into trouble. Keep an eye on your child at all times unless they are in a secure area (like a crib). Babies who can turn over, crawl, pull themselves up or walk can get into trouble in no time at all.

[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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Another baby who infrequently saw his grandmother cried as she approached to hold him. It is natural for grandparents to feel rejected by a grandchild's crying, but if the phenomenon is placed in the context of normal development, they should understand. If you have this problem, suggest that they wait awhile to become reacquainted with your baby before picking him up.

There are wide variations in the time when stranger anxiety develops and in the strength of reactions. Some babies always react more strongly than others. They scream hysterically, look terrified, and cling tightly to you. Another baby may give you a dirty look, as if to say, "Are you sure you want to hand me over to this strange person?"

When your baby's fear of strangers is at its peak, it is very tempting to sneak out of the room when you want to leave him with a babysitter. However, if you do this, your baby may become more upset than if you tell him that you are leaving. Forewarning older babies and children, telling them what is going to happen next, is a useful technique to lessen and sometimes to prevent distress reactions.

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Stranger anxiety may peak, seem to disappear then reappear over and over again over the course of the next year, depending on your baby's experiences, temperament and way of handling new situations. The process of becoming independent is begun at birth but is certainly not finished within the first three years of life. It continues in different forms throughout you and your child's lifetimes.

Babies' temperamental qualities may affect differences in the strength of reactions to strangers, but other factors-the setting's familiarity, the tiredness of the baby, and past experiences with strangers-may also come into play. Parents who bring their babies to work with them may find that their babies exhibit little stranger anxiety, because they are used to seeing so many new faces every day. What is important to understand is that your baby's fear of strangers is a healthy reaction and a part of your child's normal emotional development.

Parents as "Refueling Centers"

With your baby's ability to crawl and move away from you comes the desire to use you as a secure base from which to explore. A developmental progression can

be observed-your baby will first cling tightly to you, then move away, return for an occasional hug [or "refueling"], and then move off but continue visually checking in to make sure you haven't gone anywhere.

While younger babies require a lot of holding, feeding, and playing on your lap, mobile babies no longer need as much of your continued, close at hand attention. You may even be able to leave the baby in another room as long as you remain available and maintain some verbal communication. [Of course, you want to make sure that the room is sufficiently "baby-proofed" so your baby's safety is not in danger.] In one study mothers and babies conducted in a two room laboratory, the babies would not let their mothers leave them behind in one of the rooms, however, as long as the situation was under the babies control, and they were the ones who chose to go into the next room, the babies ventured out of their mother's sight and explored.

Your availability and occasional reassurance should be supportive of your baby's exploratory behavior. Babies at this age, who are allowed this controlled freedom to explore with the reassurance of verbal contact with the parent out of sight, seem to fare better on later tests of emotional and cognitive abilities. Allowing your baby some freedom of exploration and control over the environment and not interfering unnecessarily with what she wants to do will enhance your relationship with her.

Executive Dependence

Some scientists have called this exploratory stage at six to twelve months one of executive dependence, when a baby continues to be very dependent on his caregivers, but also has some control over them. Your baby easily may become a tyrant at this stage-for example, he may cry because he wants a cookie and then becomes frustrated because he no longer remembers what he wanted. Your baby can keep you hoping, trying to second guess what his needs are.

While your baby's continued dependence on you may be annoying and frustrating at times, meeting his basic needs is essential for healthy emotional and cognitive growth. Your responsiveness and your habit of attending to and appropriately acknowledging your baby's signals, requests, and demands will enable him to become effective in his interactions with the world. That kind of attention teaches your baby to think, "If I do something, I can have an effect. I can make something happen."