

Your child's needs

[Family](#), [Children](#)



Children need food, clothing, warmth. That's easy to see. Most parents try to give their children these things. But that's not all they need. There are other needs - just as important but not so obvious.

Your child needs to feel he is accepted by those around him. But he will keep on meeting setbacks and making mistakes. If he is told off every time he fails he could easily get the idea he is no good and give up trying. What he needs is your praise and encouragement every time he makes a little step forward.

Your child needs to be loved and feel secure. Then he can go on to love others and get on with people. You can help by showing your love with cuddles and interest in what he is doing.

The world must seem very confusing to a young child. He has to work out from scratch what is going on and how he fits in to it all. Much of what a child learns is by exploring the things around him during play and talk. If he is not allowed to explore or does not have much to do, his learning will be slowed down. Your child needs lots of new things to do and say to help him learn.

At first your baby is helpless and you have to do everything for him.

Gradually he becomes independent of you. First he learns to feed, dress and move about by himself. Then he learns to think things out and make his own decisions. In the end he will have his own friends and be able to take care of others as well as himself. Your child needs to be guided gently towards independence, without gently pushing him on too fast. Show him how to do things for himself and let him practise when he wants to try. Help him learn how to behave with other people. He will still need your protection and comfort when he is unsure of himself.

Understanding your child's needs will help you do something about them.

The rest of this section has plenty of practical hints on how to bring out the best in your child.

Babies feel safest when they are held close by their parents. So the cuddling you give your baby will help him feel secure.

The way you treat him when you are giving him routine care will also be important:

Don't leave him to cry because you are feeding him by the clock or are afraid of spoiling. Babies get very frightened and insecure when no-one answers their cries. His cries mean something.

The best thing to do is to go to your baby quickly, work out what he wants and make him comfortable as soon as possible. If you treat him this way every time he needs you he will eventually learn to trust and feel secure with you.

Often older children go back to babyish ways when they are feeling insecure or worried. They might cling and whine, or start wetting the bed.

At such times, what your child needs from you is reassurance. Comfort her and give her extra cuddles.

For your baby, cuddling and physical play are her main ways of making contact with you. 'Keeping in touch' is as good way of putting it. Although your baby likes to hear your voice, it's the softness or sharpness of the tone

that your baby notices, not the words. So as well as telling her she's the best baby in the world, show her - cuddle and hug her close.

Sometimes neighbours or relatives may say you are spoiling the baby because you pick her up and cuddle her. The best guides to how much you should cuddle are your feelings and those of the baby. Listen to her, not the neighbours. Babies differ and even the same baby is more cuddly some days than others.

Babies need to feel safe in the world. We can't make it nice for them all the time. But we can help build up trust so that they get the feeling that the world is good most of the time.

Learning to talk is one of the biggest advances in your child's early years. In just over two years your child will pick up thousands of words and fit them together into quite complicated sentences. You don't have to sit down and teach him what a question is. Long before he understands such explanations he is already asking questions.

Talking is part of everyday life. We use it to get on with people and work together. Through talking we pass on information, ask questions, share feelings. We even think with words - have you noticed how you carry on long conversations with yourself in your head? Children think aloud in conversations with another person, or by themselves in play.

A baby learns to talk in the following stages.

Even from the earliest months your baby will be able to take part in 'conversations' with you by looking, smiling and gurgling.

During their first year babies find out how to make lots of different sounds - called babbling. They have a lot of fun discovering what their voice can do. But it's not until their tenth month or later that they begin to use their voice to point out an object or to get help doing something. Once your baby realises that some sounds have special uses then he will begin to learn words.

Most children will begin to say definite words sometime around the beginning of their second year. When your child first begins to speak it is fun to keep a list of the words he uses (until you can't keep up with him. 'More' and a lot of words for food and drink will probably take up much of the list. For each word your child can say there are many more that he understands.

Most parents find that after a slow beginning their child seems to explode with words. By two your child moves beyond using one word at a time to using many words together. At first he will combine words into a single utterance, like 'there ball', 'all gone' or a description 'nice dolly'. Just over two years later, at about four years old, your child will be able to say 4 - 5 word sentences correctly. He will probably be talking non-stop!

Above all your child needs conversations. Chat with your child as much as possible and give him plenty of chances to talk as well.

There are dozens of opportunities every day of talking with your baby.

Describe what you are doing as you change him, bathe him, feed him. If the chores have to be done, talk while you work.

1. Say verses and nursery rhymes to him. Verses with actions such as 'Round and Round the Garden' or 'This Little Piggy' have been said to children for years. Children enjoy the rhythm and actions and listen closely to the sounds you make.

2. Sit with your baby on your lap and look at a picture book with him. Talk about simple pictures of animals or faces or flowers. While he's interested name the object in the picture and describe its shape and colour. Repeat the words as often as you like.

3. Talk about things that interest him. You can tell what he's interested in by noticing how long he spends looking at it. Take him for a walk around the house. Are there things that attract your baby's gaze, like a picture or a plant, or a mirror to point out the parts of the body?

4. Use plenty of gestures when you are talking so that your baby sees what the words mean.

5. Talk in sentences. Don't miss out words.

6. Have two-way conversations with your baby. If he 'talks' or makes sounds to you, stop and listen. Then answer and listen again. A conversation can go on for quite a time if you take turns like this.

As your child grows, listen to the ideas and feelings he is trying to sort out. Let him know how important you think they are. The best conversations take place when you treat your child as an equal with ideas of his own.

Once your child is talking you will be bombarded with questions. Try not to answer just 'yes' and 'no' or 'don't be silly'. Give more information and maybe ask a question back.

Even if your child makes mistakes with some words, praise him for trying. Children who are praised learn that people like them to talk. They feel talking is easy and fun, and that they are clever to be able to do it.

Children who are corrected learn that talking is difficult. Talking may become a worry because it displeases their parents. They begin to feel stupid because they can't do it properly.

So don't always correct what he says. Encourage your child to continue by listening and by answering back.