

INFANCY

SKILL ASSESSMENT

The following questions will help you identify the skills in which you excel and target those which you need to develop. By yourself or with your team, try to answer each of the questions as honestly as possible. After completing this independent living skill assessment, review it with your team and identify those skills you would like to strengthen.

	<i>I do not know about this</i>	<i>I need to know more about this</i>	<i>I know about this</i>
1. Know that infants are completely dependent on their caregivers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Know at what age babies will giggle, cough and mimic what adults and children around them are doing.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Know when a baby's first tooth may appear.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Know why teething can be a painful experience for babies.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Know how to support a baby when I pick him/her up.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Know at what age babies can hold their heads up.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Know that loud noises and sudden moves will startle a baby.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Know why it is important to respond to your baby's needs promptly and without delay.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Know how to distinguish different types of cries.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Know why it is important to bond with a baby.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Know that natural feeding and sleeping schedules will develop.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Know that it is important to talk, sing and read to a baby.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Know that I must hold and cuddle a baby.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Know that babies cry to communicate a need.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. Know how to comfort a baby.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. Know that babies who cry continuously despite efforts to comfort them may be sick or have colic.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

17. Know that it is important to give my child a lot of love and attention.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. Know that fathers should exhibit nurturing behaviors.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. Know that babies are very aware of their environment.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. Know how to cope with frustrations and stress.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21. Know whom I can ask for help if I feel overwhelmed or need a break.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22. Know that appropriate stimulation is important for your baby's development.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23. Know that infants enjoy things such as contrasts, soothing music and different textures.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24. Know that parental interactions are more important than toys.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25. Know that infants must not be disciplined.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
26. Know that infants can digest only breast milk or infant formula during the first 4-6 months of life.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
27. Know when it may be safe to begin feeding a baby his/her first food-rice cereal.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
28. Know that babies' skin is very sensitive and that they should not be exposed to sunlight for too long or they will get sunburn.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
29. Know that I should not use sunscreen on my baby until he/she is at least 6 months old.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

You have now completed the assessment section on “Infancy” and identified those skills that you would like to strengthen in order to make better decisions on your own. The following guide can help you in planning how you can learn about and practice these skills. Choose a few skills that you want to develop and, with your team, write down your plan of action. Remember, once you accomplish these goals you can go back to your assessment tool and select new goals to build on your new skills.

EXAMPLE

GOAL:

IMPROVE PARENTING SKILLS FOR MY CHILD DURING INFANCY

State Skill 1:

Plan:

When:

Who:

To bond with my baby.



To hold and cuddle my baby.



As often as possible when appropriate



Myself and baby’s father

To respond to my baby’s needs.



As often as s/he needs without delay



Myself and baby’s father

To talk and sing to my baby.



Everyday during waking hours



Myself and baby’s father

GOAL: WORK ON PRE-NATAL CARE SKILL

State Skill 1:
To be developed
and/or improved.

Plan:
How do you plan to learn,
develop and improve this skill?

When:
When, where, and how often will you
work on this skill and by when will you
have mastered this?

Who:
Who will assist you?



State Skill 2:
To be developed
and/or improved.

Plan:
How do you plan to learn,
develop and improve this skill?

When:
When, where, and how often will you
work on this skill and by when will you
have mastered this?

Who:
Who will assist you?



RESPONDING TO YOUR CHILD'S NEEDS AND BEHAVIORS

Experts agree that babies are born with some behaviors, cognitive abilities, and personality traits. However, experts also agree that much of a child's behavior, personality and even intelligence is shaped by the child's environment and particularly influenced by parents and caretakers. Therefore, parents have to be very much aware of the environment they create for-and how they relate to- their children. From the first day of a child's life through adolescence, our children respond to the kind of stimuli, structure, attention, feedback and love we provide to them. While some of the developmental needs of children, such as nurtur9ing, safety and security stay the same throughout childhood, other needs such as play activities, discipline and interaction with peers will change. In the following section, we will work on learning the skills necessary to respond to all of your child's needs at different developmental stages. We will also work on developing insight and understanding of the way children feel and think during various ages.

INFANCY

APPEARANCE AND COMMON BEHAVIORS

Infants and young babies usually seem to be primarily occupied with their immediate need for sleep and food. Particularly during the first few weeks and months, babies sleeping and eating patterns are not developed, and they may feed and sleep at all hours. Infants are startled by loud noises or sudden movements and respond favorably to calm voices and soft music. They cannot differentiate between colors, but enjoy contrast, such as black and white. Their memory is not developed which leads to the "out of sight-out of mind" effect that will continue until the baby is approximately 18 months old. The most common reason that babies cry is to communicate to their parents that they have a need, such as hunger and lack of comfort. They can suck on a bottle, pacifier or finger and they will observe their immediate environment during waking hours, quite intensely at times. However, even though babies at this age do not seem to be impacted much by their environment or parental responses, they very definitely are!

NEEDS

These first few months of a child's life are extremely important and will impact his/her development all the way into adulthood. During these first months, the child will develop a foundation on which his/her future interpersonal interactions and perceptions of the world will be built. The brain of a newborn is actually very active and, contrary to the appearance of a young baby, he/she is responding to the world around him/her. One of the baby's main developmental needs during this stage is to learn to trust. The famous child psychologist, Erikson, classified this time as the "trust versus mistrust" stage. Developing trust during this time is so important because it functions as a vital foundation for all positive human interaction. If a child does not develop a solid sense of

trust, he/she is much more likely to experience difficulty in establishing relationships with peers and adults as he/she gets older and is more likely to have trouble getting along in the world. These children who do not develop trust are also less likely to be happy and successful as adults.

Babies develop much of the necessary trust by having their caregivers respond to their needs in an appropriate and timely way. If a baby is hungry and communicates that to a parent by crying, it is important that that parent responds to that need by feeding the child as soon as possible. If a child is not feeling well, he/she will need to be cared for and comforted. When a child's diaper is wet or dirty, he/she needs to be changed promptly. If a parent does not respond to the baby's needs, the child will perceive that his caregivers are not reliable and the world around is unpredictable. He/she will not trust that his/her caregivers will take care of him/her. Therefore, it is important to understand what your child is trying to tell you when he/she is fussy or cries and that you respond appropriately.

Does your baby have different types of cries? Can you distinguish between them? What are they for? Can you describe them using the space below?

Hunger:

Type of cry?

When does it usually occur?

How do you respond?

In need of a diaper change:

Type of cry?

When does it usually occur?

How do you respond?

Illness

Type of cry?

When does it usually occur?

How do you respond?

Need for attention/loneliness

Type of cry?

When does it usually occur?

How do you respond?

Can you list additional situations when your baby is trying to communicate a need?

While some pediatricians recommend that parents should establish a set schedule and have their children adjust to such a schedule by letting them cry until the scheduled time for feeding or sleeping, many pediatricians and parents believe that it is much healthier for children to respond to their needs without delay. Often natural routines and schedules will result from these responses.

To develop trusting relationships and to bond with your baby, it's also very important to hold, cuddle and comfort your baby as much as possible. It is an old fashioned belief that you will spoil your baby by giving him/her too much attention and love. No child will be spoiled or negatively influenced by lots of attention and love! Quite the contrary- children who were not held and cuddled as babies do not do as well later on as children who were.

Evaluate how much love and attention you give to your child. Do you hold him/her often? Do you hug, kiss and cuddle your baby?

It is also important that you know what comforts your baby. Babies obviously are not capable of processing spoken language and understanding explanations like older children can do. Therefore, it is important to comfort babies in a way that meets their developmental needs. While you should always comfort your child when he/she is communicating a need, you should also engage in comforting activities even if your child is not crying or fussing. Remember, providing comfort to your child will help him/her bond with you. Help your child feel secure and let the child know that you love him/her.

How do you comfort your child?

Here are some suggestions for comforting your baby:

- ❖ Hold your baby in a snugly position so he/she can hear the familiar sound of your heartbeat and feel secure and close to you.
- ❖ Play soft music.
- ❖ Rock your baby.
- ❖ Snuggly wrap your baby in a blanket.

- ❖ Hold baby and walk him/her around the house.
- ❖ Take baby for a ride in the carriage.
- ❖ Calmly sing or talk to your baby.
- ❖ Put your baby in a baby swing.
- ❖ Take baby out for a ride in the car.

Note to fathers

It is an old fashioned belief and a misconception that nurturing and comforting babies and children is a “woman’s thing.” Fathers are just as important in providing love and attention to their children as mothers. Also responding to your baby’s needs by holding and cuddling him/her will not turn your baby into a spoiled and whiny child. Children who were comforted a lot as babies and young children are usually much more secure and confident than children who were not.

Usually, when babies’ needs for food and comfort are met, they will be content and stop crying/fussing. However, if we misinterpret what the baby was trying to tell us with her crying, then the crying will, no doubt, continue. When this happens with your baby, you need to think about what else might be wrong-maybe your baby has painful gas in his stomach or may be she is not feeling well and getting sick. If your baby’s needs have been met (he/she is fed, dry, comfortably warm and feels secure) and the baby does not respond to your attempts to comfort him/her and continues to cry and fuss, he/she may be sick. You may want to take the baby’s temperature and call the pediatrician.

Some babies who suffer from colic often continue to cry despite our efforts to comfort them because they are in pain. If you think that your baby may have colic, call the pediatrician.

If your baby does not respond to all your efforts to comfort him/her what would you do? What other things should you try or check?

STRESS

If a child continues to cry and attempts to comfort him/her do not work, parents can become stressed and frustrated. While it is quite normal to feel this way, it is very important for a parent to learn how to deal with these feelings.

Consider the following:

- **Marybeth** has a three-month-old son, Devin. Devin has colic and cries often. Her pediatrician told her that there was little she could do and that eventually he would get better. Marybeth tries to do everything she possibly can to comfort him. She rocks him, carries him, sings to him, and takes him for a ride in the baby carriage. But nothing helps. He just continues crying and crying. Today he has been screaming for hours and Marybeth feels herself getting angry and frustrated. She starts thinking to herself that she just wants him to be quiet for one minute and that she can't take this any longer.

What do you think is going on with Marybeth? What do you think she should do? What kind of advice would you give her for the future?

- **Ian** has a five-month-old son, Michael. Ian attends a community college and has one more final exam tomorrow before he will receive his Associate degree in engineering. He is kind of nervous about tomorrow's exam because he has not studied for it all that much. Now, just as he sits down to begin studying for the test, Michael wakes up from his nap and starts to cry. Ian changes Michael's diaper and feeds him and then tries to put him down again so he can go back to his studies. But as soon as Ian sits down, Michael begins to scream again. Ian makes sure that he does not have a temperature and picks him up and rocks him, but he just does not stop crying. Even though Ian doesn't have much time to study, he decides to take his son for a car ride to comfort him. Ian feels lucky. As soon as they hit the road, Michael is fast asleep. However, when they get back home and Ian lifts him out of the car, Michael begins to scream again. Now Ian is really getting frustrated. He brings Michael into the house and puts him in the swing. Ian tries to study while Michael is still screaming. Ian tries to concentrate but can't learn anything because of Michael's crying. Ian is getting very upset and starts pacing the room. He feels like he is going to explode.

What do you think is going on with Ian? What do you think he should do? What advice would you give him for the future?



SUPPORTS

Often in this kind of difficult situation parents may need to rely on supports to manage stressful times. Unfortunately, some teen parents may be afraid to tell others that they are frustrated or angry because they fear that people may think that they are not good parents. However, it is important to remember that every parent will get frustrated with his/her children at one time or the other. As stated previously, while it is quite normal to occasionally feel that way, it is very important that we learn how to deal with these feelings in a manner that is not harmful to the babies.

It can be very helpful to talk about frustrations and to seek help in a timely fashion. Because when frustrations build up, people are much more likely to do something irrational and potentially harmful and dangerous to their children. Out of control anger or frustration can damage your baby forever. Many babies who end up with serious injuries or “shaken baby” syndrome had caretakers who never intentionally wanted to hurt them, but who could not deal with their frustration and anger. Parents who are aware of and can talk about their feelings, who are able to utilize their support system and have developed coping skills, are much more likely to deal with even the most difficult situations safely and successfully.

ACTIVITY

Evaluate how you deal with frustration and anger.

Can you describe situation and events that can make you frustrated and angry?

Do you talk about these feelings with someone? _____

Whom can you talk to? _____

How do you cope with these kinds of situations?

What kind of additional things may be helpful to you in dealing with these kinds of feelings in the future?

What kind of strategies may be helpful for you in trying to prevent yourself from getting upset?

STIMULATING YOUR CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT

As stated previously any kind of interaction that promotes the development of trust for your baby is very important. As your child grows, it's also essential to continue giving your child love and attention; this is how a happy, solid parent-child relationship builds. As your baby becomes more aware of the world around him, it is important to provide him with the opportunities to explore his world safely. For babies, this begins with his looking around. Once babies can hold up their own heads, it is important to provide them with an opportunity to see their world. Babies who were born prematurely, however often cannot lift up their head as early as full term infants. To assure that these babies will meet their developmental needs you may want to use early intervention services to learn how to help your child meet that need.

Use the chart below to keep track of activities and interactions that promote these kind of developmental milestones.

Type of interaction/activity	Frequency	Meets developmental need of:

TOYS/PLAY

Another important element of a child's development is toys and play. Too often, however, parents/relatives/friends go overboard in buying toys for infants and very young babies. Many of these toys will not contribute to a baby's development.

Young babies are stimulated by and interested in contrasts, such as black and white. Young babies also like mirrors and different textures. They like soft music. (Actually some psychologists believe that listening to classical music will positively impact a baby's intelligence and ability to learn.)

But most of all babies like you! They like to be held and study your face. They like to hear your voice when you speak to them, read to them and sing to them. These kinds of things are much more important than all the toys in the world!

DISCIPLINE

Infants and babies do not have any need for discipline. As stated earlier in this section, some people may think that it is important to put their children on a rigid schedule for eating and sleeping so that it will make life easier. Some believe that immediately responding to a baby's needs will spoil him. However, most people believe that children must develop their own schedules and that responding to your child's needs rather than spoiling them will provide them with a sense of security while creating a parent/child bond that will have positive effects for a life time.

CHILDREN LEARN WHAT THEY LIVE

They learn to feel guilty.

If children live with tolerance,
They learn to be patient.

If children live with encouragement,
They learn confidence.

If children live with praise,
They learn to appreciate.

If children live with fairness,
They learn justice.

If children live with security,
They learn to have faith.

If children live with approval,
They learn to like themselves.

If children live with acceptance and friendship,
They learn to find love in the world.

Dorothy Law Nolte