

10 Great Ways to Love Your Baby



#1

First steps to a healthy baby

If you have or are about to have a baby, congratulations! Congrats on the new baby, and also on planning ahead to help your baby be strong, healthy, safe and learning.

New moms. Pregnant and new moms need healthy food, healthy exercise, enough sleep and good health care. In the first week after your baby is born, enjoy snuggling and feeding your baby, but let the dad or others in the family do as much of the other work as possible. Also be sure to visit your own doctor or clinic soon after you give birth, and mention any concerns you may have. Taking good care of yourself is important, and helps you take good care of your baby.

New dads. If you're the dad, this is a great time to care for your baby *and* the new mom. That will help give your baby a healthy start. Grandparents and other relatives can also be a huge help, especially when the baby is young and the parents are still learning.



The gift of love. Over the next few years, your baby will learn and grow in amazing ways. Your love is the best gift you can give. As you hold, cuddle, and talk with your baby, you help your baby to thrive. Even if you feel worried now, or not quite ready, you can learn as you go. There are also people and services who can help you help your baby. Parenting can be a new healthy start, for you and your baby. And that's *really* a great way to show your love!

#2

Feeding your baby

The only food a new baby needs is milk — and the simplest and best milk for a baby is the mom's. Breastfeeding is the healthiest choice for babies, is a great way to cuddle, and costs less than formula.

A loving time. Most women who breastfeed enjoy it, and are glad to be helping their baby. Still, anything new can feel a little strange at first. If you have trouble getting started, you can ask for help at the clinic or office where you get your health care (or see next page). Many women need some help and support from experienced moms at first, but soon feel comfortable. And once you're comfortable, feeding time can feel extra loving and happy — for you *and* your baby.

If health issues or adoption prevent you from breastfeeding, you can still raise a healthy, happy baby. Infant formula is a close match to breast milk, if you carefully follow the label instructions. And you can still use the quiet moments when you feed your baby as a special time to cuddle.



Practical help. The **Women, Infants and Children** program (**WIC**) may be able to help with nutrition in some key ways. WIC provides free healthy food to pregnant and breastfeeding moms, and for children to age 5 if the family meets income guidelines. They also provide breastfeeding support, or formula and bottles if breastfeeding isn't an option. To find a WIC program near you, and to learn if you qualify, you can call **1-703-305-2286**.

#3

Safe and healthy sleep

Babies need lots of sleep for their bodies and brains to rest and grow. You can help keep your baby safe while sleeping by following a few simple safety rules:

- **A crib.** To keep your baby safe and comfy, a crib placed near to your bed is best. If you need a crib and can't afford one, ask for help at the hospital where your baby is born, or at any of the groups listed in this handbook.
- **BACK to sleep.** Place your baby on his or her back to sleep. This lets your baby breathe freely.
- **No puffy stuff.** The crib should have a firm mattress, a fitting sheet, and no pillows or puffy quilts in the crib. To keep your baby warm, you can use a snuggly sleeper or warm pajamas.
- **No smoking zone.** Don't smoke or let others smoke near your baby or your baby's crib. Fresh, smoke-free air is needed for your baby's health and safety.



For safe sleep, remember the
“**ABC**’s”, and keep your baby:

Alone, on the baby’s **B**ack, in a **C**rib.

#4

Your baby's health care

Babies need regular health care “check-ups”, even when they're not sick. Reasons include:

- **Exams.** At every visit, the health care provider checks your child's body, strength and growth. If there is a problem, your baby can get help.
- **Vaccines.** Babies need shots to keep them from getting lots of very serious illnesses. These vaccines can save your baby's life.
- **Questions.** You can ask any question you have about your baby's health and needs.

If you don't have a regular place you get health care, you can ask at the hospital where you gave birth. If you need help paying for medical care, you can call toll-free to **1-877-KIDS-NOW**.

There are some great government programs to help kids get free health care, and your child may qualify.



#5

Your baby's learning

Your baby is learning all the time — from you, and from everything the baby sees, hears or touches. You can help best if you:

- Talk to your baby, right from the start.
- Read, sing, play music, or play games.
- Let your baby explore and touch things, while keeping the baby safe.
- Take your baby to fun places like the park, library, playground, or zoo.
- Eat dinner as a family, so your baby will hear how adults talk to each other.
- Avoid television and videogames, especially at this young age.

Bit by bit, you are helping your baby to learn and grow!



Help helping your baby to learn. Families are babies first teachers, but you don't have to do it alone. In fact, getting help with this important job can help your baby to learn better for life. Great programs, free to eligible families, include:

- **Early Head Start**, often based in local schools, can help your baby to learn well from the start. To find a local program, you can call **1-866-763-6481**.
- **Parents as Teachers** works in local communities to help parents learn great ways to care for and teach their babies. You can find out if there's a program near you by calling **1-314-432-4330**.

#6

Home and car safety

A safe home. You can help keep your baby safe at home if you:

- Put out of reach things that could **choke** a baby (such as coins or small toys).
- Put out of reach things that could **poison** a baby (such as pills and cleaners).
- Block **stairs, kitchens, and bathrooms** with a door or baby gate (to protect against burns, cuts, or drowning).
- *Don't* keep **guns and other weapons** in your home — or at least keep them out of reach, locked, and unloaded.
- *Don't* keep a **fighting dog** in your home — and never allow any dog and a young child to be left in a room without an adult there.



Safety in a car. To help keep your child safe in a car:

- Always use a child safety seat, starting with an infant seat that faces backward.
- Only drive when alert, wearing your seatbelt, and never after any drinking or other drug use.

Many hospitals and local programs offer free car seats to families that can't afford one. You can ask at the hospital where your baby is born, or at any of the groups listed in this handbook.

#7

Making healthy choices

To give our best to our babies, we also need take care of ourselves. In fact, many of the choices that help your health and safety also help your baby.

Healthy habits. Babies need clean air to breathe, and second-hand smoke can hurt their health.

That's why many parents — even those who've smoked for years — decide to quit when they have a child. If you want to quit smoking, or to learn more, the national **Quit Smoking Hotline (1-800-QUITNOW)** can help you get started.

It's also smart and loving to avoid a lot of alcohol, or any use of illegal drugs. After all, parenting is a big job, and you can do it better and more safely with a clear head. If you find that means hard changes, the national **Alcohol and Drug Information Line (1-800-729-6686)** can help you find free or low cost services to help. To find local self-help support groups, you can also call **Alcoholics Anonymous (1-202- 870-3400)** or **Narcotics Anonymous (1-818-773-9999)**.



Planning ahead. Another healthy choice that helps you care for your baby is to *not* have another baby unless and until you're ready. If you are sexually active (even sometimes), that means planning for and using birth control.

Most adult health care providers provide birth control, so you can ask your current health care provider. Or, you can call **Planned Parenthood** at **1-800-230-PLAN** to find free or low cost services near you. At your appointment, you can learn about your choices and decide what's right for you.

#8

A safe and loving home life

You and your baby need a home life that is safe and loving. Yet many families have problems with out-of-control anger, hitting, and other types of violence, even though they may love each other in other ways. If this is a problem in your home, you can get help. Your baby — and you — can have the safety and peace you need.

Safe care for your baby. There may be times when your baby is crying, you're tired, and you start to feel out of control. Hitting or shaking a baby is very dangerous, so it's important to avoid that. Put the baby in a crib or other safe place, leave the room, and take time to calm down. If possible, ask your partner or other family member to take over with the baby. For help calming down, you can call a friend or make a confidential call to the **Childhelp Parent Stress Line (1-800-422-4453)**.

Safety for you and your partner. Another common problem is violence by one partner against the other. If you're ever in danger, you can get police help by



calling **9-1-1**. There also are free community programs to help with tough issues like planning ahead, where to go if you're not safe at home, and how to get the help and support you may need. To find a program near you, you can call the **National Domestic Violence Hotline (1-800-799-SAFE)**. You can also call that same number if you want help controlling your own anger, so you won't hurt your partner or child.

Family life can be tough and stressful, but it's loving and smart to find ways to keep your family safe.

#9

Planning for the future

Another loving thing a family can do is to plan ahead. Nobody knows what the future will bring — but there are ways to make our families more secure for our kids.

Paternity. If you weren't married when your baby was born, there's a legal paper needed to protect the father-child relationship. Called a *paternity establishment*, this paper is the legal way of saying who the father is. It gives your child important rights, like the right to get insurance coverage or government benefits in the dad's name. It also, if you ever split up, helps the dad and child to stay involved. You can ask at any courthouse for the form you need.

Marriage. Many unmarried parents do a great job with their kids, but it's hard going it alone. Studies show that parenting couples are more likely to stay together — and are likely to be happier and healthier as a family — than parents who don't marry. Also, marriage gives legal protections to all the family members. So if you're a couple raising your child together, and you feel safe and loving, marriage may be a great way to show your love.



Grandparents and other relatives. If you're a grandparent raising your grandchild, you play an important role. If one or more parent is also involved, you may just be helping as a family member. But if the parents aren't involved, or you're worried about your role, you might need extra support. You can get lots of information and ideas, and learn about groups that can help, by contacting **Generations United Grandfamilies (1-202-289-3079)** or the **AARP Grandcare Support Locator (1-888-687-2277)**.

Legal help. If you want to talk with a lawyer about any of these issues, but can't afford one, **Legal Services Corp (www.lsc.gov or 1-202-295-1500)** may help. They can put you in touch with local offices that offer free legal help to lower income families.

#10

More great ways to help your baby

Being a parent is the world's most important job. Happily, some of the best help for parents is free of charge to eligible families. For example:

- **Nurse-Family Partnerships.** This great program offers regular home visits by a nurse, from before the baby is born and for two years after. To find out if there's a program near you, call **1-866-864-5226**.
- **Healthy Families America.** Here's another terrific program, offering parent support groups, home visits for learning about baby care, and help finding any needed services or benefits. You can learn more about the program, and find out if it's offered near you, by calling **1-800-555-3748**.
- **Healthy Start.** This exciting program, offered free in selected communities nationwide, helps babies to thrive by offering help and support to parents before and after the baby is born. To find out if it's offered near you, call **1-202-296-2195**.

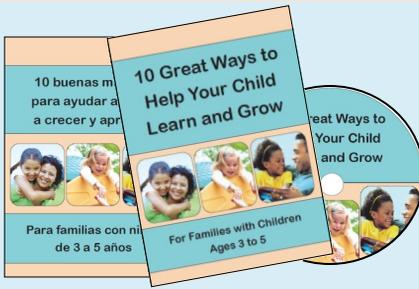


There may also be other programs to help new parents and babies in your community. To find out, you can ask your doctor, hospital, local community center, or other parents you know. (See also #5 for **Early Head Start** and **Parents as Teachers**.) Whatever group you choose, it can be a great way to make friends, feel supported, and do your very best for your baby!



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