



# Early Learning Digest

Research-based early childhood development information provided by LifeBalance Solutions

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## Creating a Responsive Environment for Your Baby

Parents and the environment they create are the foundation that shapes an infant's mental health as well as his physical and emotional growth and development. When parents provide consistent responses to their baby, the baby learns to expect that the world is a safe, interesting place and the people in it are responsive and kind. So how can you create an environment that is responsive to your baby's needs?

**Connect with your baby through touch and sound.** Babies need contact through touch and sound to feel secure and comfortable. When a baby cries and a parent responds, the baby learns that there is a connection. He will begin to associate you as a provider of care and comfort, either by hearing your voice or by being held.

**Educate yourself about your baby's developmental needs and stages.** The knowledge you gain will help you respond to your baby's needs. Understanding what your child can do during different developmental stages will also help you control frustrations you may have.

**Empathize with your baby's feelings.** Build an emotional understanding of your baby by trying to relate



to an event from his point of view. Acknowledging his feelings when you don't give in to his demands is enough reassurance. This helps your baby learn to adjust to disappointment without breaking down and that feelings and behavior are connected.

Parenting groups, friends, family, counseling, books and articles can also help you to create the environment your child needs to grow and develop. The important thing for parents to remember is that the smallest everyday moments are full of significant bonding and learning opportunities for both you and your baby.

Source: "Improve Your Baby's Mental Health with a "Good Enough" Environment, by the Center for Early Education and Development, the University of Minnesota, 2015.

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If you have concerns about your child's growth and development, please talk to your child's health care provider or go to [www.helpmegrowmn.org](http://www.helpmegrowmn.org)

## Tips to Help Adoptive Families Thrive

Research shows that social relationships heavily influence the stress hormone (cortisol) in infants and young children. The key ingredient to buffering stress is sensitive, responsive, individualized care—the type of care that leads to secure attachment relationships.

What happens when an adopted child has experienced long periods without the opportunity to form an attachment relationship? By providing a loving, responsive environment, these children can thrive. By two months after adoption, 50% of children will have fully formed attachment relationships. After 8-9 months, 90% have.

But even if an adopted child is successful at forming a secure attachment with her adoptive parent(s), there are still other challenges adopted children and their families may face. Although we often see great growth once a child is adopted into a loving, supportive family, some children struggle to adapt in other areas.

Here are some tips for parents to help adopted children succeed.

Continued on page 2.





## Safe Outdoor Play in Wintertime

Contrary to the common belief that “exposure to cold air causes a cold,” fresh air is actually good and healthy. When children and adults spend long periods of time together in indoor spaces that are small, overheated and poorly ventilated, germs and illnesses pass easily from one person to another.

Children of all ages enjoy and benefit from playing outdoors. It burns energy, gives an opportunity for a change of environment, offers a balance between play and routine, and develops gross motor skills.

The way we feel about cold, wet or snowy weather and indoor temperatures may be affected by where we live. Practices that help to ensure safe outdoor play in cold weather include:

- Dress your child appropriately for the weather; use layers of clothing that can be put on and taken off easily. The air between layers helps to keep your child warm.
- Make sure outdoor play spaces are safe in the cold weather. Outdoor play spaces and equipment that are safe in the summer weather may become unsafe when the ground is frozen or equipment is slippery from ice or snow.
- Plan activities that take advantage of cold weather. Make a snowman, use colored water in spray bottles to paint snow, or pile snow for climbing and sliding.



- Watch for signs of frostbite, especially in the face, ears, fingers or toes. Look for skin that is whiter than the surrounding area. Ask your child about feelings of pain or stinging, followed by numbness. If you suspect your child has frostbite, rub frostbitten areas, warm the area in your hands or an armpit, place the area in warm (not hot) water until color returns, or serve a warm snack like soup.
- Watch for signs of hypothermia. This happens when your body loses heat faster than you can produce it and your body temperature gets very low. Signs include cold feet and hands, puffy or swollen face, pale skin, and shivering. Seek medical help.

When you prepare for active play in outdoor weather, everyone can enjoy the health and mental health benefits of being outside and active in winter.

*Source: “Is It Safe to Play Outdoors in Winter?” by A. Rahman Zamani, MD, MPH, California Childcare Health Program, University of California, 2010.*

## Tips to Help Adoptive Families Thrive

**Continued from page 1**

- Avoid dismissing a potential problem as a general issue that all kids face. If your three-year-old struggles with sitting still and looking at a book, it may indicate a more serious problem, which if addressed in a timely manner, may be improved.
- Play fun games that support healthy brain development such as Simon Says or a memory card game.
- Create consistent routines and give firm and calm guidance.
- Keep in mind that adoption means different things to children as they age. When a child is young, she may be excited that she was “chosen” to be part of her new family. But when she’s older, she may realize that means someone couldn’t or didn’t want to take care of her.
- Be prepared for your child to have different feelings about doing things related to her birth country at different points in her development.

*Source: “National Adoption Month: 5 Tips to Help Families Thrive,” by Dr. Megan Gunnar, Ph.D. University of Minnesota, 2013.*



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