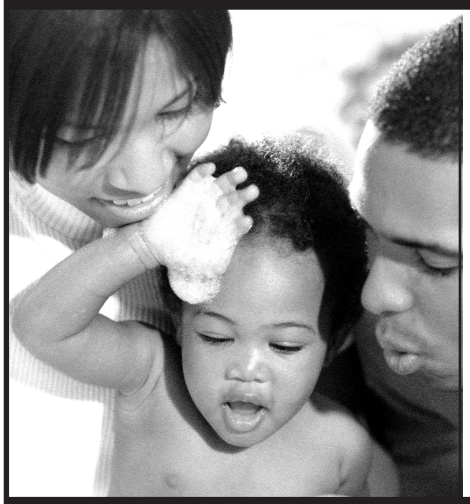
Healthy Minds: Nurturing Your Child's Development from **6 to 9 Months**

What do we really know about how a young child develops? What can parents do to best support their child's healthy development and growing brain? Some of the answers are in this series of *Healthy Minds* handouts. Each handout is based on findings from a report* from the National Academy of Sciences that examined the research on child and brain development to establish what is known about the early years. The information we offer is age-specific, summarizes key findings from the report and suggests how you might be able to use these key findings to nurture your own child's healthy development.

These handouts are brought to you by ZERO TO THREE, the nation's leading resource on the first 3 years of life, and the American Academy of Pediatrics, dedicated to the health of all children.



Key findings
from the report include:

- Your relationship with your child is the foundation of his or her healthy development.
- Your child's development depends on both the traits he or she was born with (nature), and what he or she experiences (nature).
- All areas of development (social/emotional/intellectual/language/motor) are linked. Each depends on, and influences, the others.
- What children experience, including how their parents respond to them, shapes their development as they adapt to the world.

How it looks in everyday family life:

Anne is the mother of 8-month-old Jenna. Anne's best friend, Claudia, is coming into town to meet Jenna for the first time. When Claudia arrives, Jenna will have nothing to do with her. Every time Claudia tries to talk to or play with Jenna she whimpers, turns away and clings to Anne. Anne feels frustrated and embarrassed. While tempted to just hand Jenna to Claudia, she stops, and instead holds Jenna on her lap and asks Claudia to sit next to them and read Jenna's favorite book. Slowly Jenna starts to look at Claudia and shows increasing interest. Soon Jenna starts to crawl off Anne's lap to get closer to Claudia.

This shows how all areas of Jenna's development are connected, and how her mother's response supports her healthy development. Jenna's strong bond with her mother, the trust she shows as she clings to her for safety and her fear of strangers are all signs of her **social and emotional development**. Her **intellectual development** enables her to tell the difference between who she knows and who she doesn't, and helps her take steps to get the comfort and protection she wants. She uses her sounds (**language development**), facial expressions and gestures (**motor development**) first to communicate to Anne that she is uncomfortable and wants support. Later she uses them to communicate that she is ready to interact. Anne's sensitivity to Jenna's need to warm up slowly to new situations and people helps Jenna feel loved and secure, which will help her feel more comfortable meeting new people as she grows.

Relationships are the foundation of a child's healthy development.

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Charting Your Child's Healthy Development: **6 to 9 months**

The following chart describes many of the things your baby is learning between 6 and 9 months and what you can do to support your child in all areas of her development. As you read, remember that children develop at their own pace and in their own way. Understanding who your child is, what her strengths are and where she needs more support, is essential for promoting her healthy development. If you have questions regarding your child's development, ask your pediatrician.

What's going on:	What you can do:	Questions to ask yourself:
Babies this age are big communicators. They use many sounds, gestures and facial expressions to communicate what they want. Their actions are their communications. They may be starting to put consonants and vowels together to form words like "dada" and "mama."	• Talk a lot with your baby. For example, label and narrate. "You're eating a big banana!" Give her time to respond. • Respond to her communications. See how long you can keep a back-and-forth conversation going. For example, she makes a sound, you imitate it, she makes another sound and so on.	• How does your baby let you know what she wants; what she's feeling and thinking? • What, if anything, do you find frustrating about understanding your baby's communications? Why?
As her brain grows, your baby will start to imitate others, especially you. This leads to the development of lots of new skills. Babies this age can also use toys in more complex ways. For example, instead of just holding a plastic cup, a baby this age may use it to pour water in the bathtub.	• Give your baby time to take in what you did and then copy you. Push a button on the jack-in-the-box, then wait for your baby to do it before you do it again. This teaches your baby cause and effect. Seeing that she can make things happen builds her self-confidence and makes her want to take on new challenges. • Provide a variety of safe toys for the bath—containers, rubber toys, plastic bath books, plastic ladles. These will encourage your baby to explore and experiment with the different ways to use objects. Of course, never leave your baby alone in the bath.	• How have you seen your baby imitate? • What kind of play does your baby most enjoy? What does this tell you about her?
Babies' motor skills are advancing by leaps and bounds at this stage. But all babies grow at their own rate. Many babies at this age can roll over both ways, scoot, crawl and even stand. Their motor skills allow them to make the ideas in their head happen, for example, getting the ball that rolled away.	• Encourage your baby to use her body to get what she wants. If she's showing you with her sounds and gestures that she wants the toy that is out of reach, don't just get it for her. Help her get it for herself by bringing it close enough for her to grab. This builds her confidence. • Create an environment that is safe for exploration. Make sure only safe objects are within your baby's grasp, and that anything she might use to pull herself up to her feet is sturdy and fastened down to the floor or wall. This kind of baby-proofing of your house also will reduce conflicts between you and your baby.	• How does your baby use her body—to explore, to express her feelings? • What do you need to do to make your home safer for your "little explorer?"

*The report, *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*, was a 2½-year effort by a group of 17 leading professionals with backgrounds in neuroscience, psychology, child development, economics, education, pediatrics, psychiatry and public policy. They reviewed what was known about the nature of early child development and the influence of early experiences on children's health and well-being. The study was sponsored by a number of federal agencies and private foundations.

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