

# Emotions in children (0-1 year)

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## Baby emotions

Babies are generally good at letting you know what they need, for example your baby's cry might be saying 'I'm hungry – feed me!' But they're only just starting to learn about emotions and how to express them through their behaviour and body language.

## Emotional development in babies

Children grow and develop at different rates. During your baby's first year, she is likely to:

- laugh aloud at 2-4 months.
- begin to withdraw from strangers and be more anxious with new people from about eight months – this is called stranger anxiety.
- prefer you to any other adult and be clingy towards you from about eight months.
- show signs of separation anxiety from 10-18 months, even when you just walk out of a room in your own home.
- give loving cuddles from 10 months.
- experience fear for the first time from 12 months.

You might want to seek advice if:

- your baby's feelings are difficult to understand.
- your baby's feelings don't seem right for the situation she is in.
- your baby rarely uses emotional expressions to communicate feelings – for example, she does not show you when she is happy or sad.

## Tips to help your child express and learn about emotions

**Play** is the natural way that babies and children learn and develop, and play gives them a chance to explore and express their feelings. Through play with your baby, you can help your baby learn to communicate emotions.

Play with your baby is all about back-and-forth interactions with you – it is not about toys or things. Just making faces with you is a game for your baby. And as you gaze into each other's eyes, you build your relationship too.

Here are some play ideas to help your baby explore her emotions and the way different things make her feel. These ideas also give her a chance to express those emotions:

- play through touch – for example, nursery rhymes that involve tickles.
- musical play like singing or making noise with instruments.

- outdoor play in a park or an open space where she can crawl, roll and explore different things.

It is a good idea to follow your baby's lead when it comes to play – sometimes she might be too tired to play or prefer to play quietly.

**Stranger anxiety** is normal for babies and young children. Try these ideas to help your child feel less upset around new people:

- Ask unfamiliar adults, such as extended family or adult friends, to give your child time to feel comfortable before they pick her up. Babies are less anxious when strangers approach them calmly and slowly, and do not try to pick them up.
- Give your child the chance to get to know an unfamiliar person while you are around.
- Stay close to your child. This will help reassure her that you are not going to immediately leave her with the unfamiliar adult.
- Do not worry about the stranger's feelings. Just tell them that your child is going through a phase of learning to be around strangers.

**Separation anxiety** is also normal for babies and young children. There are lots of things you can do to help her. For example:

- If you are leaving your child in a new setting like a child care centre or preschool, spend time at the new place with your child before the separation.
- Let your child take something she loves from home, like a teddy bear or blanket. These objects will help your child feel safer, and you can gradually reduce them as she feels more settled in the new place.
- Gently encourage your child to separate from you by giving her practice. Start with very short separations. Avoiding being separated from your child can make the problem worse when you have to be away from each other.



Recommended Reads by the National Library Board

## Recommended Reads

- [Making faces: a first book of emotions](#)
- [How does baby feel?](#)
- [Baby steps: a guide to your child's social, physical, and emotional development in the first two years](#)