WHAT YOUR PEDIATRICIAN WISHES YOU KNEW, p.35

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june/july 2011

baby steps

the truth about milestones

13 to 18 months

talk to me

Fun, interactive activities can boost her developing language skills.

STORY ANITA SETHI PH.D.

Your baby's ability to understand words has been increasing, so at about 14 months you can start a new, entertaining game with your little one: Show me your nose (and ears and eyes and so on). "These games lay the groundwork for language and other social skills," says Rechele Brooks Ph.D., research assistant professor at the Institute for Learning and Brain Sciences at the University of Washington. "It's a wonderful social learning experience."

The turn-taking involved is like the back-and-forth of a conversation, giving your baby practice at something she'll be doing all her life. Playing this way is also important, adds Brooks, because such activities "give infants the opportunity to learn words and to gesture." Plus, playing "show me" games allows you and your baby to focus on the same thing. **"Sharing attention by making eye contact and gesturing is an important part of the infant's social world and sets the stage for later language development."**

It's mind-boggling how much your toddler understands. Plus the sight of those chubby fingers pointing earnestly at her nose is enough reward to play again and again. Expand her repertoire of words by playing name-and-point while eating dinner (practice with phrases like "Show me the peas.") or at the grocery store (ask "Where are the apples?").

MASTERFILE

the magic of mama

9 to 12 months

Somewhere around 12 months your baby might delight you by saying "mama." He's probably thrown those syllables together before, but now he knows what it means. Saying these early words is the result of a gradual process. **"Babies understand — well before they actually speak — that things have names,"** explains Roberta Golinkoff Ph.D., director of the University of Delaware Infant Language Project and co-author of *How Babies Talk*.

As your little one practices random syllables (and often hears you say "mama loves you") he finally utters the word. When you reward him with your joyous response, he puts those syllables together again and again. Other early words are likely to be nouns as well, and while you can't really rush things, you can support early vocabulary using these tips:

label his likes Since babbling increases when he's excited, step in to name the thing that's making him happy. ("Bananas! You like the bananas?")

read to him Reading offers lots of opportunities to label things again, and babies love repetition and predictability.

tune up Captivate him with songs like "Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes" that have engaging tunes that also teach words and concepts.

FACT Babies are drawn to words with repetitive syllables, which may explain why mama, dada and bye-bye are among baby's first words.

Reading helps him connect words and objects.

buddy system

5 to 8 months

At 6 months of age, your baby can stay awake for up to three hours with fewer but longer snoozes. This more predictable schedule, combined with your baby's ever-expanding cognitive abilities, means you have a new playmate who thinks everything you do is funny.

"Repeat, repeat, repeat; that's how babies learn," explains Jackie Silberg, author of *Baby Smarts: Games for Playing and Learning*. But if your baby starts fussing or looking away, it's time for the game to end. When you follow his cues, you're teaching the most important lesson of all — that he can count on you to take care of him. Try these games, which should reward you with delicious baby giggles:

bubble time Babies love bubbles, so let him examine one when still on the wand and then touch it. The pop may surprise him, but after a few tries, he'll understand this lesson in cause and effect.

box it up Fill a shoe box with ordinary items (plastic containers, blocks, spoons) and let baby "discover" them. Show him how to put them back in and do it all again.

singalong Try "Pop Goes the Weasel" and whenever you say "pop," clap your hands. He'll love that he can start to predict when it's going to happen.

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- Even when babies themselves start getting vaccines, they may not be fully protected until they've had at least 3 doses.
- To find out where you can get vaccinated, go to **soundsofpertussis.com/#/findadoctor**

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She'll be touching everything now that she's discovered her hands.

get a grip

0 to 4 months

A few weeks ago, her hands were curled into tight fists and she had no control over them, but now, at about 3 months, she can open them, and they'll remain half-open much of the time. As your baby discovers her hands, she'll gaze at them in fascination, watching her fingers flutter and turn. She's just discovered that those wiggly fingers are part of her own body, and they're about as miraculous to her as they are to you. **She's learning a great deal, such as how to move and control her fingers,** and she's on her way to getting that little fist into her mouth.

In the meantime, she's happy to experiment with all that her hands can do — from one hand gripping another to simply waving and wiggling fingers at her command, so just let her be. Switch things up with wrist rattles or give her small sound-makers to hold. Make sure, though, that baby has plenty of time with nothing in her hands at all so she can get used to the feel of moving them individually.

TIP Now's the time to free her of swaddling blankets and other clothes that trap her hands. It's nice to be cozy, but it's enchanting to learn.