



# Kindness Summary

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## Why Kindness?

Whether it is your 3-month-old crying uncontrollably when you leave their sight or your own feelings of inadequacy when trying to respond to your infant's crying, establishing regular ways to build a trusting connection along with teaching your child vital skills will grow their ability to show kindness toward others in the future.

**Tip** These steps are best done when you are not tired or in a rush.

**Tip** Intentional communication and actively building a healthy parenting relationship will support these steps.

## Step 1. Getting to Know and Understand Your Infant's Input

- Consider how the distinct sounds of your infant's cries connect with their body language. Check out these common cues and see if they match your infant's feelings and associated needs.
  - If infants are uncomfortable, they may issue a less intense, short, whiny cry like "eh, eh, eh."
  - If infants are in pain, their eyes may be closed or may open for a second and look blankly into the distance. Parents often feel a greater sense of urgency with this cry. If it's gas pain, they may scrunch up their face and pull their legs up.
  - If infants are hungry, they may produce a cry that looks either similar to anger or discomfort depending on the intensity. Cries can be short, low-pitched, and rise and fall.
  - If infants are tired, they may be rubbing their eyes while closing and opening them. They may pull at their ears and yawn.
- Working to identify their specific cries with physical cues can help you be responsive to their needs. For example, if an infant is uncomfortable, respond by loosening or changing their clothing or swaddling or changing their position to see if it helps to soothe.
- It takes time to learn what your infant is communicating with you. As you practice, you'll get better at recognizing their style of communication.

They will feel a greater sense of your understanding and responsiveness and your interactions will become more two-way instead of one-way.

## Step 2. Teach New Skills by Interactive Modeling

- Ensure daily face-to-face interactions.
  - Talk up close to your infant. Make a point when they are in a high chair, crib, or stroller to get down on their level. Narrate what's going on around you or tell a favorite memory or story.
  - When encountering new people or situations, get on their eye level and introduce your infant to those new experiences to help them feel safe.
  - Express love up close. Children need to hear they are loved at every age. Start now and get in the habit of assuring your infant that they are loved no matter what.
- Hold your infant close regularly.
  - Rocking in a rocking chair is a soothing way to connect and hold an infant.
  - Baby carriers offer a way to move about with your infant close to your heart.
  - Share the holding. Enlist other trusted family members or friends to share in holding your infant close.
- Offer sensory exploration. Infants come to know and understand the world and the objects around them through all five senses -- touch, taste, smell, sound, and sight. Keeping safety and supervision in mind, place objects near your infant for exploration.
  - Infants in their first year of life can benefit from regular time on their tummy. Lay your infant down on a blanket. Include items within or if attempting to crawl, just out of reach, for infants to explore including baby-safe mirrors, blocks, and board books.
  - Reading regularly with your infant provides experience with their first literacy skills as well as offering time for valuable connection. Allow your infant to choose the book and help turn pages to involve in reading.
  - Offering time to explore water is wonderful playtime for infants, keeping safety and supervision in mind. Whether you provide a small bowl with cups on the kitchen floor or get into the bathtub, infants can exercise their hands and body movements while learning about water and play.

**Trap** Don't expect a long attention span with any one activity. Follow your infant's lead. They likely will signal with a short cry or simply change their attention when they need to shift their focus.

## Step 3. Practice to Grow Skills and Develop Habits

- Allow your infant the chance to interact with new people of all ages with you at their side.
- Create a consistent routine with regular nap times, play times, and meals.
- Model warm greetings and be certain to introduce your infant to new people. Share one thing you know or love about that person with your infant to make a caring connection.
- When out in your community while running errands with your infant, make introductions and involve your infant in conversations with neighbors, the bank teller, or the grocery cashier.
- Many children are born with a cautious or shy temperament and may not readily warm up to strangers and might show fear. Respect that temperament by not forcing interaction and instead, model your own kind interactions with others.
- Read together. When you read stories together, you engage in an activity that can be deeply connecting for both of you. Reflect on the story, and you will take the learning opportunity one step further. *"The little girl was sharing with her friends. That was kind of her."* Involve your infant in selecting the book, holding it, and turning the pages to build ownership and interest in reading.

**Trap** Do not force physical interactions like hugs, high fives, or hand shakes between your infant and other new individuals. Teach your child early that they can control their own physical space and are never obligated to make physical contact with another.

## Step 4. **Support** Your Infant's Development and Success

- Learn about your infant's development. Each new age presents different challenges.
- Recognize effort by using "I notice..." statements like: *"I noticed how you smiled at my friend Nina. I love seeing that."*
- On days with extra challenges when you can see your infant is scared of new people or situations, offer confidence in your child's ability to face the unfamiliar. In a gentle way, you can say, *"Anna is kind. You might enjoy meeting her today."*
- Actively reflect on how your infant is feeling when approaching challenges. *"We are going to be with a lot of new people today. I will introduce you and hold you so you will feel more confident."*
  - You can also offer comfort items to help your infant face new challenges. *"Would your blanket help you feel better?"* Swaddle your infant or you may use a pacifier to offer comfort.

**Trap** Don't move on quickly if your infant shows interest in a new person. Infants often need more time to adjust with new individuals. Be sure to wait long enough for your child to warm up to the new person. Your waiting could make all the difference in whether they are able to gain relationship skills over time.

## Step 5. **Recognize** and Celebrate

- Smile at your infant.
- Make eye contact.
- Use caring facial expressions.
- Be physically gentle and caring with your infant.
- Use words to celebrate and encourage. Recognize and call out when all is going well: *"I notice you smiled at my friend. I love seeing this."*
- Build celebrations into your everyday routines. Promote joy and happiness by laughing, singing, dancing, hugging, and snuggling to appreciate one another.

**Tip** The first year is filled with amazing changes -- and not just for your child. Don't forget to recognize and celebrate your own development and milestones as a parent.

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