



FREE GUIDE FOR PARENTS

Connecting with *your newborn*

*Simple, everyday activities to build emotional
connection from the very first weeks*

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Connection is built *in small moments*

The first weeks with a newborn can feel beautiful, overwhelming and exhausting — sometimes all in the same hour. If you're wondering whether you're “doing it right”, you're not alone.

Here's the good news: emotional connection isn't built through perfect routines or special equipment. It grows in ordinary moments — a feed, a nappy change, a cuddle, a look — repeated many times a day.

In this guide we share simple activities to help you get to know your baby and enjoy being together. Choose the ones that feel right for you. There's no checklist to complete.

FOR EVERY FAMILY

This guide is for mums, dads, partners and any caregiver. If your baby was born early or spent time in hospital, these ideas still apply — check with your care team about what's right for your baby right now.



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01

Why connection matters

Your baby's brain grows faster in the first years of life than at any other time, and it grows **through relationships**. Every time you notice your baby and respond, you help build the pathways for feeling safe, calming down and connecting with others.

Newborns can't calm themselves yet. They borrow your calm — your voice, your touch, your heartbeat — to settle. This is called **co-regulation**, and it's the foundation of emotional regulation later in life.

02

Your baby's language

Before words, babies communicate through their body. Learning their signals is one of the most powerful ways to connect.

“I'm ready to connect”

- Calm, bright, alert eyes
- Looking at your face
- Smooth, relaxed movements
- Turning towards your voice
- Soft sounds and cooing

“I need a pause”

- Looking or turning away
- Yawning, hiccups, sneezing
- Arching the back
- Splayed fingers or fists
- Fussing or crying

When your baby looks away, it's not rejection. They're taking a break to regulate. Pause, wait, and let them come back to you.

Nine activities *for connection*

Short, simple and repeatable. A few minutes is enough.

01 Skin-to-skin cuddles

Any time you're awake and alert

TRY THIS

- 1 Lie back comfortably, semi-reclined.
- 2 Place your baby on your bare chest, wearing only a nappy, with a blanket over their back.
- 3 Make sure you can always see their face and nose.
- 4 Breathe slowly. Notice their weight, warmth and rhythm.

WHY IT HELPS

Skin-to-skin helps babies regulate temperature, heart rate and breathing, and can help you feel calmer too.

Safety: do this only while you're awake. If you feel sleepy, place your baby on their back in their own cot.

02 Look, pause, wonder

5 minutes when your baby is calm and alert

TRY THIS

- 1 Sit comfortably and simply watch your baby, without trying to do anything.
- 2 Notice their face, hands and movements.
- 3 Wonder quietly: *what might you be feeling? what are you noticing?*

WHY IT HELPS

Being curious about your baby's inner world is how you learn their unique language.

03 Face-to-face conversations

During calm, alert moments

TRY THIS

- 1 Hold your baby about 20–30 cm from your face — the distance newborns see best.
- 2 Smile, raise your eyebrows, talk softly.
- 3 When your baby makes a sound or movement, answer it. Then wait for their “reply”.

WHY IT HELPS

This back-and-forth, known as *serve and return*, builds the brain's circuits for communication and connection.

Follow their lead: when they look away, give them a pause.

04 Narrate and sing

Nappy changes, bath time, walks

TRY THIS

- 1 Describe what you're doing: *"Now I'm lifting your legs... here's a clean nappy."*
- 2 Sing a lullaby or a song from your own childhood — in any language.
- 3 Use a warm, slow, sing-song voice.

WHY IT HELPS

Your voice is familiar from the womb. It helps your baby feel safe and supports early language.

Speaking your home language, or two languages, is a gift.

05 Gentle touch

After a bath or when your baby is calm

TRY THIS

- 1 Warm your hands and ask with your voice: *"Can I give you a little massage?"*
- 2 Use slow, gentle strokes on legs, feet, arms and back.
- 3 Watch their cues. If they turn away or fuss, stop and just hold them.

WHY IT HELPS

Loving touch helps babies relax and learn that their body is safe and cared for.

Ask your child health nurse about suitable oils and techniques.

06 Connected feeds

During some feeds each day

TRY THIS

- 1 Whether breast or bottle, hold your baby close and look at their face.
- 2 Put your phone away for a few feeds a day.
- 3 Talk softly or simply be together in silence.

WHY IT HELPS

Feeds happen many times a day — they're natural moments of closeness and co-regulation.

With a bottle, try swapping sides at each feed, as with breastfeeding.

07 Your calming toolkit

When your baby is unsettled

TRY THIS

- 1 Hold your baby close, upright or against your shoulder.
- 2 Rock or sway gently, rhythmically.
- 3 Try a soft “shhh” sound, dim lights and a quieter space.
- 4 Stay close. Your presence is the message: *I'm here.*

WHY IT HELPS

Babies can't be spoiled by comfort. Responding helps them learn that distress can be soothed.

Every baby is different — over time, you'll discover what works for yours.

08 Close carrying

Walks, errands or fussy evenings

TRY THIS

- 1 Use a sling or carrier that fits you and your baby.
- 2 Follow the T.I.C.K.S. rule: Tight · In view at all times · Close enough to kiss · Keep chin off the chest · Supported back.

WHY IT HELPS

Being carried close to your heartbeat and movement is calming for many babies.

09 A small daily ritual

Once a day, at a time that suits you

TRY THIS

- 1 Choose a moment — bath time, a morning cuddle, a bedtime song.
- 2 Repeat it in the same way each day.
- 3 Keep it short and simple.

WHY IT HELPS

Predictable rituals help babies feel safe, and give you a moment of connection to look forward to.



— WHEN IT FEELS HARD

Repair, crying *and caring for you*

Crying is your baby's main way of communicating. Many babies cry more in the first weeks, often peaking at around 6–8 weeks, and then it gradually eases. It doesn't mean you're doing something wrong.

No parent is in tune all the time. Research on parent–baby interaction shows that moments of mismatch are very common. What builds trust is **repair**: noticing, coming back and reconnecting.

If you feel overwhelmed, it's okay to place your baby safely on their back in their cot and step away for a few minutes to breathe. **Never shake a baby**. Call someone you trust to help.

WORTH REMEMBERING

- ☐ You can't spoil a newborn with comfort.
- ☐ Connection grows in small moments, many times a day.
- ☐ Looking away is a pause, not a rejection.
- ☐ Repair matters more than perfection.
- ☐ You need care too.

My week of *small connections*

Not a test — just a gentle way to notice the connection that's already happening. Tick what you shared each day.

	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
Skin-to-skin	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Face-to-face chat	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
A song or story	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Gentle touch	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
A connected feed	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Our daily ritual	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

SOMETHING I NOTICED ABOUT MY BABY THIS WEEK...

Where to find support

If you're feeling low, anxious, overwhelmed or not like yourself, please talk to your GP, midwife, child health nurse or a psychologist. In Australia: **PANDA National Helpline 1300 726 306** · **Pregnancy, Birth and Baby 1800 882 436**. In WA: **Ngala Parenting Line 1800 111 546**. In an emergency, call **000**.

ABOUT US

We are a Perth-based psychology practice founded by Francisca Lessa Stewart, Registered Psychologist. We support parents and families through attachment, early development, and perinatal and infant mental health — in English and Spanish.

WANT TO GO DEEPER?

The First 1000 Days workshop

A warm, practical space for expecting parents and parents of babies aged 0–2 to understand secure attachment, bonding and early emotional development.

SEE UPCOMING DATES

theconnectedminds.com

ONE-TO-ONE SUPPORT

Book a session

If you'd like individual support for you and your baby, you can book directly through our online portal.

BOOK ONLINE

[clientportal.zandahealth.com/clientportal/connect
edmindspychology](https://clientportal.zandahealth.com/clientportal/connectedmindspsychology)

FURTHER READING

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