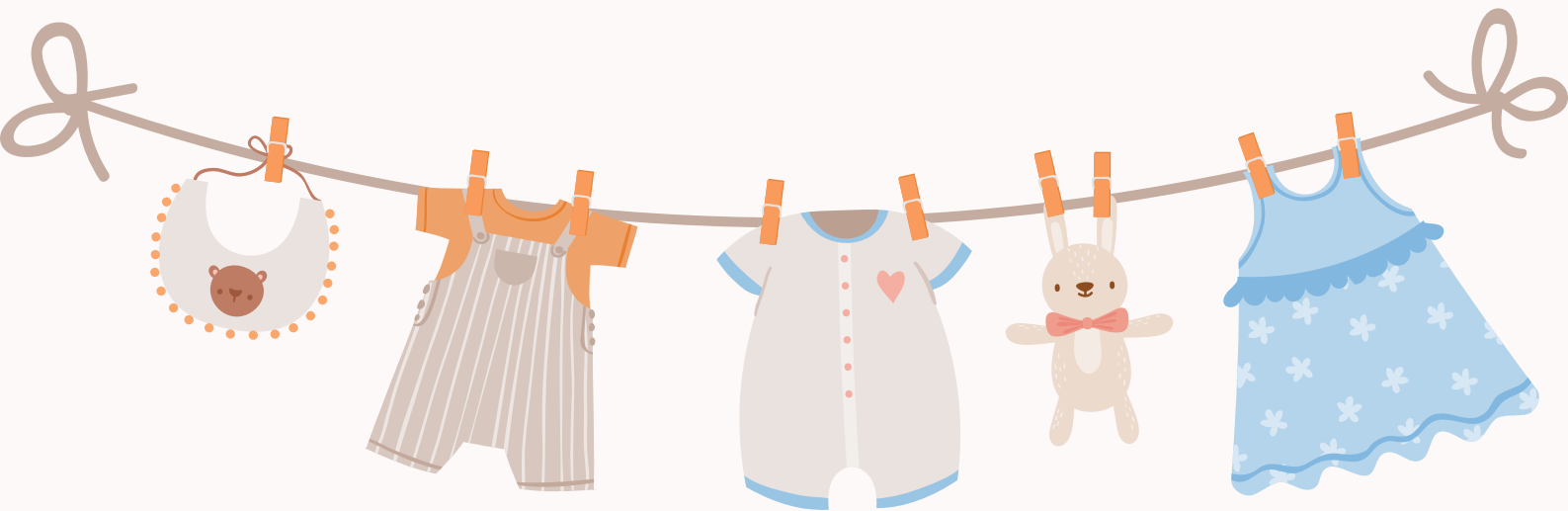


# Bonding with Baby

A Nurture Network Guide



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# *Welcome!*

Congratulations on the arrival of your little one! The early days and weeks with your newborn are a precious and transformative time, laying the foundation for a lifetime of love, trust and emotional security. This guide is crafted to support you on this incredible journey of bonding with the newest member of your family.

In these pages, you will find information about the fourth trimester and attachment, practical tips and evidence-based advice to help you create a strong and lasting bond with your baby. From understanding your newborn's cues and needs to fostering a secure attachment through responsive caregiving, we explore the intricacies of the early parent-child relationship.

Our guide will be your companion in navigating the joys and complexities of newborn life and will help you prepare for the beautiful adventure of getting to know your little one.

# The Fourth Trimester

## Taking baby's perspective

The “fourth trimester” refers to the initial three months after birth, during which a newborn undergoes significant adjustments to life outside the womb. This period is vital for both your baby's development and for their relationship with you.

For your baby, the fourth trimester is a time of adaptation. In the womb, they were enveloped in a warm, secure environment where their every need was met automatically. After birth, they are suddenly exposed to a world of sensory stimuli including light, sound, touch and temperature changes. This transition can be overwhelming and newborns often seek comfort and familiarity to cope. They rely on their senses, particularly touch and smell, to navigate this new environment. Skin-to-skin contact, gentle rocking and soothing sounds mimic the womb's sensations, providing a sense of security and reducing stress.

## Why is bonding during the fourth trimester so important?

- **It creates a strong foundation for baby's later development**

During the fourth trimester, babies experience rapid brain development. They learn to focus their eyes, track movement and recognise faces, laying the foundation for social and emotional skills. Newborns are highly responsive to human faces and voices (look out for baby following your voice when you move around or leave the room!). Interactions with their caregivers, such as making eye contact, talking and cuddling stimulate neural connections, fostering emotional bonding and trust. These early experiences are fundamental for your baby's emotional wellbeing and social development in the future.

- **It's important for you as parents too!**

For parents, the fourth trimester is a period of adjustment, learning and immense caregiving responsibilities. They must decipher their baby's cues, respond promptly to their needs and establish a nurturing routine. Sleep deprivation, coupled with the demands of caregiving, can be really challenging. Developing a strong bond with your baby helps you feel more confident in your abilities as a parent and strengthens the foundation for a secure attachment\*.



\*See note on Page 3!

# What is attachment?



Attachment theory is a psychological framework that explains how the relationships we form with our caregivers during early childhood influence our emotional and social development throughout life.

At its core, attachment theory suggests that infants are biologically predisposed to seek out their caregivers, especially in times of distress or threat. When caregivers are responsive, consistent and emotionally available, infants develop a sense of security and trust in their caregivers. This sense of security forms the basis of a strong emotional bond – or attachment – between the child and the caregiver. Attachment theory highlights the importance of nurturing and responsive caregiving in promoting healthy emotional development and stable relationships throughout life.

## Understanding Infant Cues

### What they are and why they matter

Newborn cues are the subtle signals and behaviours that infants use to communicate their needs, feelings and sensations. These cues include crying, facial expressions, body movements and sounds such as cooing or fussing. Understanding and responding to these cues are crucial for several reasons:

1. **Communication:** Newborns can't express themselves verbally so cues are their way of communicating hunger, discomfort, tiredness or the need for affection.
2. **Building Trust:** Responsiveness to a baby's cues fosters a sense of trust and security. When you consistently meet a baby's needs, the baby learns to trust the world around them, supporting a secure attachment.
3. **Emotional Development:** Prompt responses to your baby's cues helps to regulate their emotions. Feeling understood and cared for lays the foundation for healthy emotional development.
4. **Language Development:** Responding to coos and babbling encourages babies to engage in vocalisations, which are crucial for language development.
5. **Brain Development:** Positive and responsive interactions with caregivers promote healthy brain development, particularly in the areas associated with social and emotional intelligence.
6. **Parent-Child Bond:** Prompt responses to your baby's cues strengthens the bond between you and them, creating a loving and secure relationship.

# Common Infant Cues

Decode what your baby is telling you!

Cue	What does it look like?	What does it mean?
Rooting Reflex	Baby turns their head and opens their mouth when touched on the cheek	Baby is hungry
Sucking Motion	Sucking on fists, fingers or objects	Baby is hungry
Fussiness	General restlessness and fussiness	Baby is uncomfortable, try a nappy change or change of position
Arching Back	Usually coupled with crying or grimacing, baby arches their back while pulling their head and leg backwards	May be a sign of various issues including reflux, gas, overstimulation or sensory overload
Snuggling	Nuzzling into the caregiver's body	Baby is seeking comfort and security
Closed Fists	Hand is closed in a tight fist	May indicate overstimulation or hunger
Open Hands	Hand is relaxed and open	May indicate contentment or readiness to engage with caregiver
Quiet Alertness	Calm and attentive, looking around	Baby is ready to engage with the environment (or with you!)

# Bonding with Your Newborn

How to foster a strong and secure connection with your baby

## Skin-to-Skin Contact

Also known as kangaroo care, skin-to-skin contact is vital for newborns as it regulates their body temperature and stabilises heart and respiratory rates. It also enhances bonding, reduces stress and boosts baby's immune system. With baby in just a nappy, try placing them on your bare chest, covering you both with a warm blanket, for as long as is comfortable for you both.



## Talk and Sing to Your Baby

Your baby might not be able to talk back (yet!) but remember that your voice is very familiar to them – they've heard it every day for the last few months from inside the womb. Hearing your voice helps them recognise you and feel comforted. Try to talk or sing to your baby frequently, even if it's just narrating your day or whatever it is you are doing with them in that moment.



## Use Feeding Time

Whether breastfeeding or bottle-feeding, use feeding times as an opportunity to bond. Maintain eye contact and enjoy the close physical contact with baby.

## Playtime

Playing with your newborn might not look exactly how you might expect! "Playtime" doesn't need to involve lots of special toys or equipment. Instead, smiling at and engaging with your newborn is what's really important for their social and cognitive development. Your face is baby's favourite toy!

- **Peek-a-Boo:** Use a soft cloth or your hands to play peek-a-boo which helps to develop object permanence (baby's understanding that objects and people exist even when out of sight)
- **Sing and Talk:** Sing lullabies or talk to your baby, or read aloud from a story book
- **Sensory Play:** Provide textured toys or soft fabrics for them to touch and explore different sensations; try using soft rattles or toys with gentle sounds to engage their auditory senses
- **Mirror Play:** Show baby a baby-safe mirror or stand in front of one while holding them, allowing them to gaze at their reflection, fostering self-awareness

## Eye Contact

Eye contact is crucial for newborns as it fosters emotional connection, helps in social and emotional development and enhances communication skills, laying the foundation for healthy relationships later in life. It also promotes bonding and trust between baby and its caregivers. Try making eye contact with your baby when you're talking to them or caring for them e.g. during feeds or nappy changes

## Babywearing

Using a baby carrier to carry your baby close to your body can soothe baby and promote bonding and has the added benefit of keeping your hands free for other activities!



## Routine and Predictability

Predictability provides a sense of security for babies and helps them to feel safe and secure. However, manage your expectations as to what "routine" might look like in the early days! Newborns do not typically feed or sleep on a schedule but gradually in the first couple of months, you may start to see a natural "rhythm" emerge which can help you to structure your day. That might just look like having meals or getting out for a walk at roughly the same time each day initially and move into a more concrete routine over time.

## Use Gentle Touch or Massage

Gently stroke your baby's skin, hands and feet. You could also try gently massaging your baby. The gentle strokes regulate baby's body, relieves stress and fosters relaxation, creating a secure and loving environment for baby to develop in.



## Be Patient!

Remember that every baby is unique and bonding takes time. You might feel that "surge" of love straight away or you might not, both are perfectly normal. Be patient with yourself and your baby, allowing the relationship to develop naturally. This is a continuous process that evolves over time. Just by spending time with your baby, nurturing and responding to their needs as best you can, the bond between you and your newborn will naturally flourish.



# A Final Note

We hope you've found this guide helpful. As you engage with the information and tips provided here, remember that the journey of bonding with your baby is one that takes time. By being attuned to your baby's needs, offering love, patience and consistent care, you're not just creating a secure attachment; you're building a sanctuary of trust and affection where your little one can thrive.

As you embark on the remarkable journey of parenthood, remember that every smile, every cuddle and every shared moment strengthens the connection between you and your baby. They are the building blocks of a bond that will last a lifetime.



## Who we are

Nurture Network aims to promote perinatal and infant wellbeing for all new families in Ireland.

Please check out our website for more resources:

[www.nurturenetwork.ie](http://www.nurturenetwork.ie)

[@nurturenetwork.ie](https://www.instagram.com/nurturenetwork.ie)

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