

Well Child Care

TIP SHEET FOR PROVIDERS

Key Themes

- Older infants need support and delight in their new capacities for exploration. Older infants think they are BIG and want to be part of everything.
- Reassure that along with these new BIG ideas, which is a good sign of cognitive development, that their baby will be more determined about their ideas and will protest and fuss more often than when they were younger.
- Introduce the parent’s important role of providing co-regulation for their baby’s bigger emotions.
- Emphasize that helping infants when they are upset by soothing and re-directing is not spoiling and actually helps the infant develop their own emerging capacity for emotion regulation.
- Highlight shared moments of delight. These moments shape a baby’s development and are a buffer for all families especially those under stress
- Continue to follow cues for feeding, sleep and interaction, just like with younger infants.

Development

6 month old babies are becoming much more **social and curious** and want to be part of whatever is going on. It can take parents by surprise that the baby will interrupt breast feeding or won’t settle into sleep if the baby thinks they are missing out on something.

Babies at this age have more clearly defined preferences and **protest** about little things that they were previously unaware of, like being laid down for a diaper change or not being picked up right away when they want to be held.

Stranger anxiety is often beginning (which can be seen as early as 2–4 months). 6 month old’s often protest when parents leave the room or their line of vision.

Sitting balance is emerging. The baby will often be able to sit upright by propping a hand in front of them (tripod position).

Babies prefer to be upright or be held by their parents so they can see better and be part of all of the interactions around them. Being close to their parents face enables them to share attention.

Providers—Frame these changes as good signs of the baby’s cognitive and social development. Reassure that it is not spoiling to respond to their baby’s increased curiosity and need for interaction. By helping with these new BIG emotions, their baby feels understood and the parent stays “in tune” and connected. Providing this “co-regulation” now helps their baby develop self-regulation as they get older.

Feeding

Between 4 to 6 months of age, most infants start to show interest in what their parents are eating. They show interest during mealtimes by visually tracking what others are eating, or by making movements with their mouth or reaching out for a sip or a bite. This is a developmental window that opens at this age for the introduction of solids (aka “complementary foods”).

Babies are hard-wired to want to be part of these communal mealtimes and these shared moments of eating together are about so much more than just the food. **Shared mealtimes are a time for turn-taking, back and forth conversation, imitation and shared delight.**

When parents talk to their baby during feeding about cues and what their baby is communicating, language is learned more readily.



Encourage families to eat together, even at this young age. Babies love to be part of these communal mealtimes.

By 6–7 months, babies are usually being offered solid foods (soft, pureed foods) 3×/day (breakfast, lunch and dinner). Encourage the family to eat together whenever possible. Older infants love to feel like they’re big and part of the action.

Feeding disruptions become more common since the older infant is sometimes too curious to stick with or finish a feeding. It is still important to follow the baby’s cues which tell parents about the baby’s inner state, ie if the baby is still hungry or getting full, tired, over-stimulated, ready for something new, etc.

Providers—Ask parents if they think their baby is showing any interest yet in solids. This opens a conversation about the baby’s readiness from the perspective of what the parents are already observing. Encourage parents to think of starting baby foods as their chance to have the baby eat with them. Encourage parents to talk about the cues that their baby is giving during the feeding.

Sleep

Around 3–4 months of age, babies start to **develop a circadian rhythm**. Babies start to sleep less during the day and need to sleep longer hours at night. Their bedtime shifts to much **earlier at in the evening**. Missing this need for an early bedtime can start a cascade where the baby becomes fussy and overtired, takes longer to get to sleep, wakes up soon after falling asleep and is hard to get back to sleep.

In older babies, the signs of sleepiness can become more subtle because they are motivated to stay up and socialize. Subtle signs of sleepiness include a shorter attention span or needing to be distracted/repositioned more often. Late signs of sleepiness include rubbing their eyes, batting at their head (which parents can worry means an ear infection), pulling their hair and increased fussiness.

When infants are helped to sleep at the first sign of sleepiness in the early evening, they are more likely to be able to consolidate several sleep cycles and have an initial long stretch of sleep. *When the baby is overtired, they aren’t able to do this* Babies at this age enter sleep during the Quiet phase of the sleep cycle so are easier to put down in a “sleepy but awake” state to fall asleep.

SUMMARY

- **Notice how curious and social the 6 month old is** while also now expressing more preferences and BIG emotions.
- **Introduce the idea of co-regulation of the baby’s bigger emotions.** Also continue to emphasize that it’s not spoiling to respond to their baby’s cues.
- **Encourage families to talk about cues** that their baby is giving in the moment. (“Oh, you seem so happy, or Oh, you didn’t like that. . . . Are you done eating? . . . Do you want me to pick you up?” Etc.)
- **Frame starting baby foods** in terms of the feeding relationship and encourage the family to share mealtimes together.
- **Focus on sleep timing:** Encourage a predictable nap and bedtime ritual with fading away by the parents (if tolerated by the baby).
- **Watch for the emergence of the much earlier bedtime** and help parents protect the baby from becoming over-tired.
- **Support and contain parent’s concerns** to help parents be more present with their baby (parallel process)

Many 6-month-olds nap 3–4 times during the day.

Predictable routines and rituals with naptimes and bedtimes at the first sign of sleepiness help the baby anticipate what’s next, feel seen and understood and settle into a pattern. This is a good time for parents to continue fading away during the transition to sleep. With practice and repetition, older infants can learn to anticipate sleep and self soothe to sleep.

Providers—Encourage parents to watch for early signs of sleepiness, recognize the need for an earlier bedtime, continue calming routines, and try to fade away during the transition to sleep.

More information available at pcrprograms.org

Referenced sources include: Promoting First Relationships in Pediatric Primary Care, Keys to Infant Caregiving, Parent-Child Interaction (PCI) Feeding & Teaching Scales, Sleep/Activity Program and BabyCues® Encouraging parents to treat nighttime very predictably (ie dark, with minimal interaction) will help the baby learn and follow the pattern of settling to sleep at night.