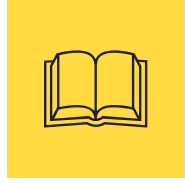


Everyday opportunity #1: Sleep & rest



Getting enough sleep is important for your baby's developing brain and body. Up to 30% of children can have sleep problems from time to time. You may also have trouble getting the sleep you need as a new mother or as the mother of a busy toddler. Many new mothers share stories of sleepless nights and exhaustion. Sleep and rest are very important for your physical and mental health. Here are some ways you and your baby can grow together. Remember that each baby is different. Together you will find out what works for you.

About your own sleep:

- Many parenting books suggest that if you are getting up a lot in the night or if your child is having a nap, to try to rest during the day. It is up to you to decide if this is practical, or if you would prefer to get some chores done around the house.
- Be comfortable asking people to help you so you can get the rest and sleep you need.
- Create a bedtime ritual or routine for yourself. You may have to adjust your routine as the demands of your baby change.

About your infant and child's sleep:

- Get to know the signs that your baby gives when they are sleepy, such as becoming irritable, rubbing their eyes, or yawning.
- A short light massage before bed may help children settle if this is something they enjoy. It may also be a nice part of a bedtime routine for your partner or someone else who is helping you.
- Try to avoid TV or videos right before bed for your child.
- Babies may sleep better in a bedroom that is quiet, comfortable, and familiar.
- Bed time routines are helpful for young children (like "the 4 B's" – bath, brush, book and bed). Make sure that the routine you create is not too much for you. Ask for bed time help if you need it.
- It is best not to share a bed with your baby. It is especially unsafe if you are very tired, under the effects of alcohol or other drugs or taking certain medications. Sharing a room with your baby or sleeping within arms reach is safe for your baby.
- Develop a family plan so others can help your baby develop good sleep routines while you recover.



Everyday opportunity #2: Routines & transitions



Infants and toddlers need people around them doing things in the same way. This helps them feel secure. Many parents use the routines that they were raised with themselves. It is important for new parents to talk together about their own family routines that have meaning for them and that are important for their culture. It is important to talk together about the goals they have for routines for their new family.

Here are some ways you and your baby can grow together. Remember that each baby is different. Together you will find out what works for you.



From Zero to Three: Love Learning and Routines

- Routines help babies and toddlers learn self-control. Consistent routines, activities that happen at about the same time and in about the same way each day, provide comfort and a sense of safety to young children. Knowing what will happen next gives babies and toddlers security

and emotional stability. When children feel this sense of trust and safety, they are free to do their “work”, which is to play, explore and learn.

- Routines can bring you and your child closer together and reduce power struggles. Stable routines allow babies and toddlers to anticipate what will happen next and gives young children a sense of control. Routines can also limit the amount of “no’s” and behaviour corrections that you need to give a toddler throughout the day, since your child can better predict what should happen next.
- Routines guide positive behaviour and safety. Routines are like instructions – they guide children’s actions toward a specific goal. Routines can be used for many reasons, but two of the most important are ensuring children’s health and safety, and helping children learn positive, responsible behaviours.
- Routines support children’s social skills. As babies grow, they come into contact with more people and begin to learn patterns and routines for social interactions (such as greetings and goodbyes). These interactions are also opportunities for developing language skills.
- Routines are satisfying and helpful for parents too. Not only do routines and rituals make transitions easier for children – they also help ease adults into parenthood.

Developing and keeping routines can be harder to do if you have mental health challenges.

- It is important for you to have people in your life that your child knows well and trusts to give them the extra time and attention they need.
- Ask someone you trust to work with you to develop a family plan about your children's routines. Share the plan with others who are helping you out. This will help keep many of the routines the same for your child.
- Remember that it takes time to develop routines, sometimes weeks or months.

Supporting transitions

Transitions are the changes that are needed to get from one activity to another. For infants or toddlers this may be a change in caregiver, environment, or routine. One example of a transition is when your child is finishing playing and getting ready for bed.

- Provide verbal cues that a transition is coming (such as 5 minute warnings) and non-verbal cues (such as showing a picture for the next activity).
- Building transition times into your routines.
- Make sure that the ways you help your child transition are right for the age of your child.



Your child will also experience transitions as they grow older, such as going from breastfeeding to cup feeding, or from diapers to potty training. Here are some ways you can help prepare your toddler for a change:

- Try not to have more than one big change at a time
- Read books about the transition, or provide toys that allow them to act out the change
- Make sure that the changes your child is making are right for their age.

More resources on routines and transitions

- Family Routine Based Support Guide (<http://challengingbehaviour.fmhi.usf.edu/do/resources/tools.htm>)
- Zero to Three Love, Learning and Routines (<http://www.zerotothree.org/child-development/social-emotional-development/love-learning-and-routines.html>)

Everyday opportunity #3: Feeding



Feeding is about more than nutrition. The connections you have with your baby during feeding times help you develop your relationship together. Here are some ways you and your baby can grow together. Remember that each baby is different. Together you will find out what works for you.

- Make the choice of how to feed your baby that works the best for you. You should feel comfortable with this choice.
- Most medications for mental illnesses are safe to take if you are breast feeding. Have your doctor look at your medications to make sure they are safe for you and your baby.
- Hold your baby during breast feeding and bottle feeding. Sit with your child during meal times when they are older for communication during feeding.
- Toddlers are messy eaters! This messiness may bother you more at some times than others. Try out things like giving your baby smaller amounts of food at once to make less mess if that helps you. Your toddler learns by exploring with food. Be sure that they have time to learn how to feed themselves.
- Your partner, family and friends can help with meal times. Together, your baby will get the connections that they need to grow.
- When you or other caregivers respond to your baby's feeding needs and preferences, you help them learn what their body is saying about being hungry or full. This helps your baby develop.

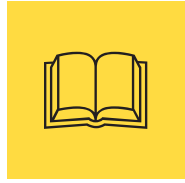


- Turn off the television and put aside your cell phone so you can focus on each other during meal times.
- As soon as your child is able, encourage them to participate in meal time preparation. Even toddlers can do simple tasks like setting the table or mixing things. Involving your child helps build connections to you and helps them develop.

More resources on feeding:

- BC Healthy Families Feeding (<https://www.healthyfamiliesbc.ca/home/articles/topic/feeding>)
- Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre: Healthy Living Toolkit for Families (<http://keltymentalhealth.ca/toolkits>)
- National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health: Growing up Healthy (http://www.nccah-ccnsa.ca/389/Childhood_Health_and_Wellness_Resource_Booklets.nccah)

Everyday opportunity #4: Activity & play



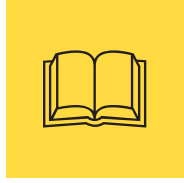
Physical activity includes any activity where most of the body is moving. When babies are allowed to move and explore on their own, they learn about their environment and their abilities. Play is the child's language and way of interacting with their world. Playing or taking your baby out for a walk might be the last thing you feel like doing when you are not well. The medication that you are taking might slow down your energy at certain times of the day. Try to be available to your baby physically and emotionally as you are able, even if it is for shorter amounts of time. Here are some ways you and your baby can grow together. Remember that each baby is different. Together you will find out what works for you.

- Follow your child's lead and show interest in their activity.
- Have family and friends take on some play activities with your child. These are good moments to widen the circle of trusted adults in the life of your child.
- Get out in your neighborhood and meet some other mothers and families.
- There are many everyday objects around your house that you can offer babies for their play. These objects don't have to be fancy. The most important thing you can provide for your baby related to play is you!
- It is never too early to start reading to your baby. Sit your baby on your lap and look at picture books together. Talk with your baby about what you are seeing and reading. Hearing your words helps your baby develop their talking.
- Babies can become overstimulated if there are too many objects or toys around. Too much stimulation at one time can confuse babies and cause them to miss some learning. It can also irritate babies and make them more difficult to settle.
- Activities that involve nature can lower feelings of stress and improve well being for you and your child. Try spending some time outdoors with your family.

More resources on play and activity

- Infant Mental Health Program: Comfort Play and Teach (<http://www.imhpromotion.ca/ParentResources/CPTActivities.aspx>)
- LEAP BC Move with me from Birth to Three (<http://decoda.ca/resources/online-resources/resources-child-family-literacy/leap-resources/leap-bc/move/>)
- NCCAH Parents as First Teachers (<http://www.nccah-ccnsa.ca/en/publications.aspx?sortcode=2.8.10&publication=90>)
- Play and Your Baby and Play and Your Toddler (<https://www.bccf.ca/topic/the-early-years/>)
- Zero to Three Tips and Tools on Play (<http://www.zerotothree.org/child-development/play/tips-and-tools-play.html>)
- Zero to Three App on Play (<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.app.ZEROTOTHREE>)

Everyday opportunity #5: Touch



Everything we do with our children involves some form of touch. For babies and young children, touch and holding provides love and security. There are also benefits to the person providing the touch, such as lower stress and anxiety and more confidence in parenting. Here are some ways you and your baby can grow together. Remember that each baby is different. Together you will find out what works for you.

Some of the everyday ways you can bring touch into your parenting are:

- Infants – during breast feeding, bottle feeding, changing diapers, dressing, cuddling, bathing, massaging, carrying
- Toddlers – during bathing, helping with personal routines, during play, cuddling, holding to read, consoling if they are crying, massaging, carrying

Pay attention to your own responses to touch (you may or may not feel comfortable). Remember that it does not mean that you are a bad parent if you feel uncomfortable touching your baby or being close to your baby, especially at times when your illness is more severe. Children can get the cuddles they need from everyone in their life, including you, your partner, family and friends.

- Every baby has its own needs for touch. Watch how your child responds in different situations and see what works to make them happy.

- You may find that it helps to build in time where you are a little bit away from your baby (even if it is a quick cup of tea on the couch while baby plays nearby). Even short breaks from parenting activities can help you stay well.
- If you have babies who need to be held more than you are able to manage, arrange with family or friends to come by regularly to play with the baby.
- It is helpful to see how your baby responds to other forms of stimulation, such as sound, light, and movement.
- For infants and young children who may be more sensitive to, or overstimulated by touch or other stimulation, try different things to figure out what they can manage. For example, some children eat better if the room is quiet during meal times. There are many resources to help you make a sensory environment that works for your child.
- Many people have been told that touching or holding babies a lot can spoil them. Share with your family and friends that touching and holding helps babies and toddlers grow and develop.

More resources on touch

- Decoda Literacy Solutions: Sensory Play (<http://decoda.ca/read-all-about-lit/sensory-play/>)
- International Association of Infant Massage (<http://www.iaim.net>)

Everyday opportunity #6: Communication



Communicating is needed for healthy child development, especially social and emotional development. Parents need to try and figure out the things that are interesting to their child, and how they like to communicate. The more you know about your child, the better you will be able to match what you do with the needs of your child.

1. Reading cues - the language of infants

Infants and toddlers communicate their needs and feelings through their body language, or “cues”. Infant cues are the body language that tells us that infants are ready to communicate or that they need a break. As you spend time with your baby you will get to know your baby’s own cues. You and your baby will learn about each other as you spend time together. Approaches like “Watch-Wait-Wonder” can help you in these steps of watching your baby’s face and body, waiting to see what they do (cues), and wondering about what your baby might be feeling or needing from you. You can also let your family and friends who are helping you know about your baby’s cues.

Babies and toddlers also are able to read the cues that you send. They can tell how you feel by looking at the expressions on your face and hearing your tone of voice.

If you are not feeling well, try to be aware of your behaviour (like body language or tone of voice) around your baby.

2. Crying

Babies and toddlers cry as a way of communicating. Sometimes parents find that a crying baby increases their own stress. Parents may become frustrated or may withdraw. Babies and toddlers may not get their emotional and physical needs met. Sometimes just holding the baby and walking the floor can get the baby—and you—through this hard time. Other times this may not work. Sometimes a parent can be so frustrated with the crying that they lose control and without thinking, shake their baby. It is ok to put your baby in

Engagement – when the baby gives you signs that they want to be with you. Signs include looking at your face, reaching out to you, relaxed tone, smiling and cooing

Disengagement – presents as stress and means that the baby is telling you that they need a break or a rest from what you are doing. Signs include fussiness, pulling away, squirming or pale skin.

a safe place and walk away for a few minutes while you calm yourself. It helps if you have other people who can help you settle your baby.

3. Early language

Learning how to talk helps the toddler to share their thoughts and feelings. As your toddler gets older, they begin to ask lots of questions about the world around them. They begin to try to be independent by saying no and not doing what parents ask them to do. This can be hard to deal with for many parents. It can be frustrating for parents who may feel that they are at the end of their patience or energy.



Here are some ideas to help you communicate with your child. Remember that each baby is different. Together you will find out what works for you.

- Talk to your baby from the earliest days. One simple way to do this is to say out loud what you are doing or what you are seeing. Remember that looking at you, cooing, smiling, and making sounds are how your baby communicates with you. Responding to these cues helps the speech and social development of your baby.
- You can still talk to your child when they are in a stroller or car seat. Get down to eye level to talk.
- If there are several languages spoken in your home, you can talk to your child in all of the different languages.

- Set aside a bit of time in the day (for example, two or three 5 -10 minute sessions) when you can focus on reading your child's cues and responding to them while you are talking and playing together.. If you have more than one child, it helps if you can find time to focus on each one of them on their own.
- Activities like feeding and bathing your baby need to be done every day. Talk to your child and listen to them as you make your way through these daily activities.
- It might feel hard for you to communicate with your baby. Try to use a positive expression on your face as you talk to and play with your baby. If you feel you cannot respond positively, ask someone else to come in and play with the baby for a while.
- It can be easy to believe that a baby or toddler who is crying or difficult to settle is "out to get me". The cues that a baby gives you like crying or pulling back are their ways of telling you that they need something or that they are stressed and upset.
- Small children are able to pick up on and react to situations you might not think they can. Be aware of your behaviour around your child when you are not feeling well. It will help when your child is old enough to let them know in simple words (like telling them you have sad sickness or are seeing the doctor to get help) that you are not well. It is not their fault and not their job to worry as you are taking steps to get better.

More resources on communication:

- Alberta Health Services Preschool Talk Box (<http://humanservices.alberta.ca/family-community/talk-box-preschool.html>)
- BC Ministry of Education Early Learning Programs (<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/theme.page?id=F2DF0F6E09AD8EB24078E5EEAA8DCC68>)
- NCCAH Parents as Teachers (http://www.nccah-ccnsa.ca/389/Childhood_Health_and_Wellness_Resource_Booklets.nccah)
- Period of PURPLE Crying (<http://purplecrying.info/>)
- Your Child's Feelings (<https://www.bccf.ca/topic/the-early-years/>)

Everyday opportunity #7: Support & resources



Having access to supports and resources can help you stay well.

Friends, family, and other experienced people can support you and help you meet the changing needs of your growing young child.

You may be thinking about how to talk about your illness to your young child, and what to do if your illness keeps you from parenting full time. It is important to remember that young children are resilient and strong, and that you can grow together.

Supports

For many parents, having young children means that they put their own needs after the needs of their children. It is important to keep up with the treatments that have been working for you.

Some parents feel guilty or ashamed asking for help. They may have had a bad experience asking for help before and found that people judged them or thought they were undeserving of help. People might have told them to pull themselves together or get on with things. Parents may not have the energy to follow up on getting resources.

- Find time for just yourself, or yourself and your partner. Regular breaks are a good way to avoid getting burned out or overtired. Take your breaks regularly and before you start feeling overwhelmed. This can be 10 minutes during the day or a few hours away from the home with your partner when you are ready. Often parents don't realize how stressed they are until it becomes overwhelming. Parents may also not know that they are overwhelmed. It is not selfish to look after yourself. Keeping yourself healthy helps the whole family.
- Talking to other mothers is very helpful. You will all have lots of practical tips to share with each other.
- Public health nurses are helpful. They can visit you in your home. They can tell you about the services in your community like neighbourhood houses and drop in groups.

“I just tried to suffer through it alone; I was too busy with the new baby to continue with the CBT and the psychiatrist.”

- Many parents find it useful to develop a family plan with other family members or friends. A plan helps everyone know what you would like to happen if you become unwell again and unable to care for your child. These plans are reassuring for you, your child, and for other key adults in your child's life. Involve people close to you in your care plan. Ask your mental health worker to include your partner and/or family members if this would help their understanding of your illness and your recovery plan.

- Sometimes family members or friends may say things that are hurtful or may not understand what you are going through. It may take them time to learn more about how to be more helpful. Surround yourself with supportive people as much as you can.

If you are not able to parent full time:

There are many reasons why you might not be able to care full time for your children. You may need to go to the hospital or a treatment center to receive care for your illness. You may need to have another family member, friend, or foster parent look after your children some or all of the time while you recover.

- It is alright to take a gradual approach to parenting to make sure that you feel comfortable. Sometimes parents take on too much too soon, and they are not ready for it yet. Think about where you are in your illness and recovery, be realistic, and take small steps when you are ready.
- No matter what the outcome, you have a right to be involved in decisions about your children. There are different ways that you can be involved in planning for



your child's care for when you are not well. If the Ministry for Children and Family Development is involved, you have full rights to information, advocacy, and supports to help you be able to parent.

- Many parents find it helpful to develop a family plan to help everyone know what they would like to have happen with the care of their child if they are not well. Once you know you are pregnant, making a plan for both your pregnancy and when you have had the baby is ideal.

Resources for supporting parents:

- BC Council for Families (<https://www.bccf.ca/topic/the-early-years/>)
- BC Ministry for Children and Family Development: Positive Parenting Videos for Immigrant and Refugee Families (http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/child_protection/positive_parenting.htm)
- BC Ministry for Children and Family Development: Collaborative Planning and Decision Making in Child Welfare (http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/child_protection/mediation.htm)
- Children of Parents with Mental Illness: Developing a Baby's Care Plan (<http://www.copmi.net.au/parents-and-families/parents/developing-a-care-plan.html>)
- Here to Help (<http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/>)
- Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre (<http://keltymentalhealth.ca/>)