



BONDING  
with BABY

*Becoming a Parent*

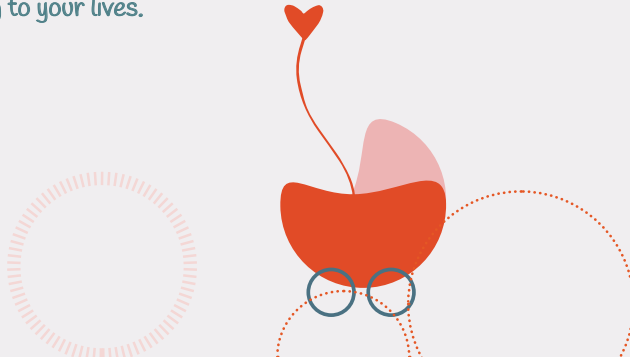
## *Becoming a Parent...*

Becoming a new parent is a big change and big changes can be challenging and affect how we feel. Parenting is really rewarding but also hard work. There will be times when you will be unsure of what to do; try and remember that it is the same for everyone. You will have good days and bad days and it is normal for it to take time to feel confident and comfortable in your new role.

Having a new baby can lead us to think about our own childhood and may bring back some memories of that time, both good and painful. It is very common to feel a range of emotions from joy and excitement to fear and confusion.

It can be useful to think about the type of parent you would like to be. What are your hopes and dreams for you and your new baby? And what supports would be helpful?

Having a new baby can also bring up questions about our new identity as a parent and can also lead to changes in our relationship with our partner. If you have a partner, talk about the difference a baby will bring to your lives.



## *Looking After Yourself as a Parent...*

It is really important to take good care of yourself. We need to look after our own wellbeing because it will help us to cope better with the ups-and-downs of being a parent.

When you feel well and content, you are better able to manage stress, maintain happy relationships, communicate your feelings and really enjoy life with your new baby.

You can make a really big difference to the health and happiness of your baby by the way you look after yourself.



*The Five Ways to Wellbeing are five things, that all of us can do, day to day, to help us feel better.*

- Connect with your community, your friends, family, partner. Let them support you and always ask for help if you need it. Arrange a daily phone call with a friend and meet local parents through classes or online groups.
- Take notice of the changes in your body and the world around you and try to enjoy the little things. Be grateful for your body which has brought a little person in to the world!
- Be active, perhaps go for a walk, or a swim, or dance to your favourite music. Exercising makes you feel good and helps to cope with change.
- Keep learning, as knowing more about what is going on and what your baby needs will help you feel calmer and more confident.
- Try to spend time with your partner and share your feelings with one another, focusing on all the big life changes you are both going through. Connecting will help the transition to becoming parents easier.

## *Getting To Know Your Baby...*

From the very first moment your baby is born, she wants to be close to you as this helps them feel safe and secure. Your baby will want to communicate with you through eye contact, facial expressions and body movements. It is good to try to understand how your baby might be feeling.

Getting to know your baby can take time and babies are all unique and different, with some easy to soothe and settle and some more unsettled. Your baby will develop and thrive when they feel safe and loved.

Your baby can recognise your voice from birth, so talk to them in a gentle soothing voice. Get face to face with your baby when talking to them, making sure they can see and look at your face. When you talk to your baby, it helps them understand their world and how they may be feeling and helps them learn how to communicate.

*Delight in Your Baby!*



## Connecting and Bonding with Your New Baby...

Your baby will use body language to show you when they want to connect with you and strengthen the bond between you. For example, your baby may smile at you or make eye contact, make little noises or look relaxed and interested.

When you talk, play and respond to the little sounds and gestures your baby makes, it helps them to learn to communicate, build social skills and to express their emotions.

Holding, smiling and talking to your baby releases oxytocin, a loving hormone, in both you and your baby. This makes you both feel calm and happier and enjoy being together.

Reading to your baby is a really nice way to be close and to bond. Baby will be soothed listening to your voice and it can also help them develop early language skills.

Rock your baby and speak to them gently, telling them what you are doing and what happens next. Although they cannot speak yet, communicating with your baby will help them to understand and manage her emotions now and in the future.

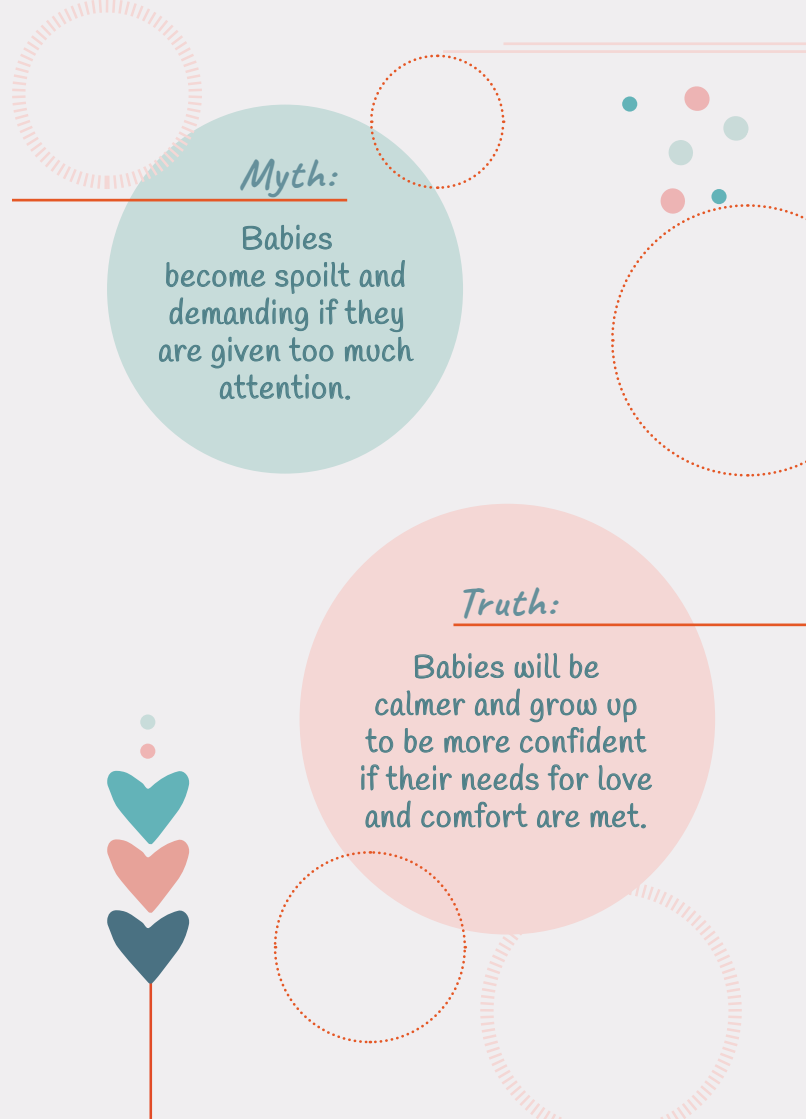
Just listen and look at your baby – and take your baby seriously. Right from the beginning, babies can sense love, respect and that feeling of being valued for who they are, which is so crucial to self-esteem and confidence in later life.

### Myth:

Babies become spoilt and demanding if they are given too much attention.

### Truth:

Babies will be calmer and grow up to be more confident if their needs for love and comfort are met.



## *Responding to Your Baby...*

Caring for babies in a responsive way helps build a strong and loving bond. Trust your instincts – responding quickly to your baby's cries will not 'spoil' him or her, but will make your baby feel safe and loved and help him or her grow up to be confident and happy.

Being responsive will involve keeping your baby close, cuddling and stroking her body, talking to her in a gentle, soothing voice, learning the signs when she wants to be fed or comforted, and comforting her as soon as possible when she cries.

It can take time to learn and recognise your baby's cues and signals and you will not always get it right but that is ok.

The early months of intense neediness from your newborn soon pass and caring for your baby quickly becomes easier, so don't worry if it feels challenging at the start.

### *Why it is important to respond to your baby:*

When you notice your baby's body language and respond to it, she or he feels safe and secure. This helps you to build a strong relationship with your baby. Responding to your new baby lets them know that their needs matter and are important to you.

Being there for them when they are small helps them to feel secure and confident and allows them to grow into relaxed, easy going children.

### *Myth:*

Babies must get into a routine as this makes your life easier.

### *Truth:*

Young babies are not capable of learning a routine. Responding to their cues for feeding and comfort makes babies feel secure, so they cry less, which makes your life easier too.

## Recognising Your Baby's Cues and Body Language

Baby cues are your baby's way of trying to tell you what he or she needs. Your baby's body language will tell you how he or she is feeling. By watching your baby, you will start to pick up and notice the cues. This can take a little time so don't worry if you don't always get it first time.

Your baby will give you clues to let you know what he or she needs. Let's take a look at some cues your baby may be giving.

### *I am Hungry...*

Babies often give little cues before they start crying loudly. Your baby may start moving their mouth, sucking their fist, make sucking sounds and might make some little noises or small cries before they start crying loudly.

### *I am Tired...*

When your baby is tired, he will often send the following cues;

- Becomes quiet and still
- Loses interest in people and toys
- Frowns or knots his eyebrows
- Clenches his fists tightly
- Rubs his eyes and ears and starts fussing

It is good to start to notice the sleepy cues otherwise your baby can get grumpy and harder to settle.

### *I Want to Play...*

New babies have a very short time that they are able to play and engage with you. As your baby grows you will notice that he or she is able to play for a longer time. Your baby may send the following cues that she wants to play;

- Turns her head toward you
- Looks at your face
- May reach out to you and grasp a finger
- Makes eye contact and smiles
- Moves her lips as though they are saying 'ooh'

### *I Need a Break...*

When your baby needs a break, they will let you know. Small babies can only engage and maintain eye contact for short periods of time. Your baby may send the following cues;

- Looks away and turns his head to the side
- Starts to squirm and frowns
- Kicks or arches his back
- Raises his hand

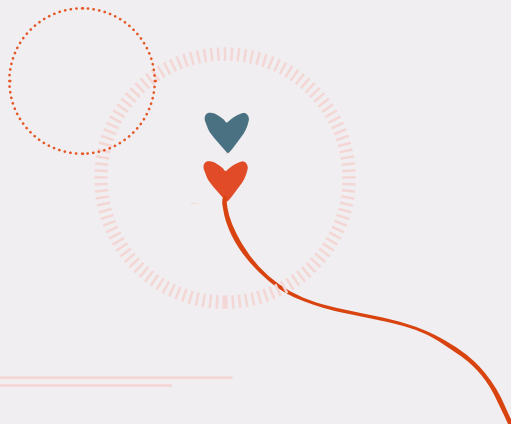


## *I'm Not Bonding with My Baby...*

Some parents bond and feel connected to their babies the first time they meet. But it is also OK if you do not feel an instant connection. Bonding with your baby can sometimes take weeks or months of getting to know and understand your baby and adjust to this big change in your life.

Talk with family members and friends and try not to put extra pressure on yourself. If you don't feel you can share how you are feeling with the people you know then you could talk to your public health nurse or your GP.

Sometimes the bond takes time to grow and it does not mean you are not a 'natural' parent.



Here are some activities you can try to help you connect with your baby:

- Skin to skin contact lets your baby know they are loved, safe and protected.
  - Copy your baby's noises or signals, pause and wait for your baby to respond before continuing.
  - Once you have learned what your baby likes, do it regularly. Babies love repetition!
  - Start new activities gently, and speak in a calm, soothing tone.
  - Soothe and cuddle your baby when they are upset.
  - Breastfeeding your baby promotes closeness. If you are bottle feeding, hold your baby close during feeding.
  - Hold your baby on the left side of your chest, so they can hear your heartbeat.
  - Touch and massage your baby.
  - Smile and laugh while looking into your baby's eyes.
  - Talk, sing, read books together.
  - Brush your baby's hair gently with a soft brush.
  - Give your baby a bath.
- 

## Useful Contact Numbers

Most new parents experience loneliness, self-doubt or feeling down. If you are struggling help and support is available.

The 'baby blues' are very common and can leave new Mums feeling irritable, tearful and anxious. New Dads can experience this too.

Becoming a new parent can be overwhelming. If the feelings persist for more than two weeks after the baby is born, it is important to get in touch with your GP, Public Health Nurse or Midwife.

The following organisations may also be helpful:

Coidiv offer childbirth education, postnatal support, breastfeeding support and local meets and events.  
e: [info@coidiv.ie](mailto:info@coidiv.ie) / [www.coidiv.ie](http://www.coidiv.ie)

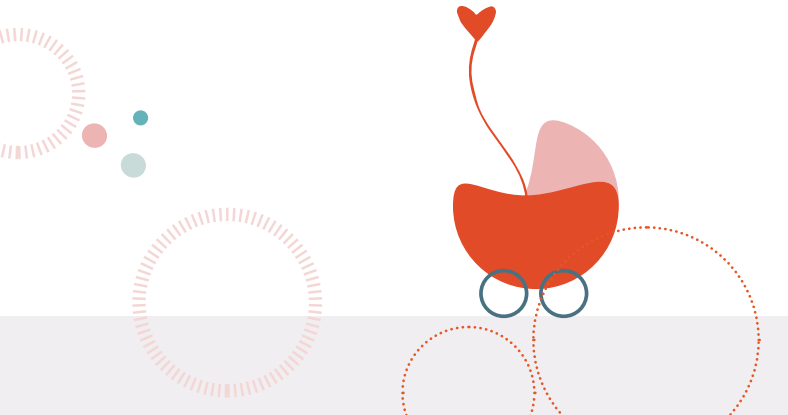
Postnatal Depression Ireland provide support, help and friendship to those suffering from the effects of Post Natal Depression.  
e: [support@pnd.ie](mailto:support@pnd.ie) / t: (021) 4922083 / [www.pnd.ie](http://www.pnd.ie)

Parentline is a national, confidential helpline that offers parents support, information and guidance on all aspects of being a parent and any parenting issues.  
t: 01 8733500 or 1890 927277 / [www.parentline.ie](http://www.parentline.ie)

One Family provide support and information for people parenting alone, sharing parenting and for those separating. t: 01 6629212 / lo-call helpline: 1890 662212 / e: [info@onefamily.ie](mailto:info@onefamily.ie) / [www.onefamily.ie](http://www.onefamily.ie)

Mychild.ie offer lots of information on pregnancy, babies and toddlers. [www.mychild.ie](http://www.mychild.ie)

Tusla's Parenting24seven promotes key messages on what works best for children and families at different ages.  
[www.tusla.ie/parenting-24-seven/](http://www.tusla.ie/parenting-24-seven/)







**BONDING**  
with **BABY**



**Area Based Childhood**  
Programme



**CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE**

Responding to Needs, Driving Change

**TÚSLA**

An Ghníomhaireacht um  
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach  
Child and Family Agency