



Growing Safely: Tips for Baby Safety Month

Every September, Baby Safety Month reminds us to take a closer look at the environments where our little ones live, play, and grow. Babies develop quickly, and safety needs change just as fast. Here are age-based tips to help keep your child safe through the first years of life:



Birth to 6 Months

- **Safe Sleep:** Always place your baby on their back, in a crib or bassinet with a firm mattress and no pillows, blankets, or stuffed animals.
- **Car Seat Safety:** Use a rear-facing car seat that is properly installed for every ride.
- **Feeding Safety:** Hold your baby during feedings—never prop bottles.
- **Never Leave Unattended:** Even very young babies can roll unexpectedly; always keep a hand on your baby during diaper changes or when placed on high surfaces.



9-12 Months

- **Choking Hazards:** Keep small objects, cords, and plastic bags out of reach. Begin offering safe, age-appropriate finger foods cut into small pieces.
- **Mobility Safety:** As babies begin to crawl, use baby gates, secure furniture, and cover electrical outlets.
- **Bath Time:** Always supervise closely—never leave your baby alone near water, even for a moment.
- **Toy Safety:** Check toys regularly for broken parts and avoid anything with small pieces.



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12 Months & Older

- **Walking & Climbing:** Secure heavy furniture to walls and keep sharp or breakable items out of reach.
- **Outdoor Safety:** Supervise closely near driveways, playgrounds, or water. Apply sunscreen and use hats for sun protection.
- **Car Seat Update:** Children should remain rear-facing as long as possible, following car seat manufacturer guidelines.
- **Explore Safely:** Encourage safe exploration with age-appropriate toys and play spaces free of hazards.



By taking small, thoughtful steps, parents and caregivers can greatly reduce the risk of injury and give their babies a safe environment to thrive.

Remember: Safety isn't about restricting curiosity—it's about creating safe spaces where babies can learn, grow, and thrive. By staying one step ahead as your child develops, you give them the freedom to explore the world with confidence.

Shining a Light on Suicide Prevention

September marks Suicide Prevention Month—a powerful reminder that mental health is just as vital as physical health, and no one has to face their struggles alone. It's a time to ignite hope, share life-saving resources, and foster open, compassionate conversations that can truly make a difference.

Suicide and mental health struggles can affect anyone, including new mothers. Adjusting to life with a baby brings joy, but it can also bring exhaustion, stress, and feelings of overwhelm. For some, postpartum depression or anxiety may develop—and without support, those feelings can intensify.

Warning Signs to Look For (in yourself or someone you love):

- Talking about feeling hopeless, worthless, or like a burden
- Withdrawing from family, friends, or activities
- Extreme mood swings or sudden calm after a period of sadness
- Difficulty bonding with baby or feeling detached
- Changes in eating or sleeping patterns beyond normal new-parent exhaustion
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs

This month—and every month—let's remind ourselves and others: asking for help is a sign of strength, not weakness. Supporting new mothers in caring for themselves is just as important as caring for their babies.

RESOURCES

National Maternal Mental Health Hotline

1-833-943-5746 (24/7 support)

Postpartum Support International:

Call or text "Help" to **1-800-944-4773** or visit: www.postpartum.net

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

(24/7, confidential support)
Dial **988** from any phone

Find Local Help:

Contact your local Healthy Families program at (540) 948-3916 ext. 440 for resources and support services.



StartSmart is designed to share practical tips and advice each month to help you nurture your baby's growth and development. From encouraging milestones to promoting healthy habits, **StartSmart** is here to support you every step of the way on your parenting journey!

Baby's First Milestones: What to Expect and When

Your baby's first year is a whirlwind of growth, discovery, and heartwarming "firsts." From the first smile to the first steps, each milestone marks an exciting chapter in your child's development. But what's typical, and when should you check in with your pediatrician? Here's a month-by-month overview of key physical, social, and cognitive milestones—and tips on when to seek guidance.

- 1-3 Months**
 - **Physical:** Lifts head briefly during tummy time, moves arms and legs with jerky motions.
 - **Social:** Begins to smile responsively, enjoys looking at faces.
 - **Cognitive:** Tracks objects 8–12 inches away, reacts to sounds and voices.
- 4-6 Months**
 - **Physical:** Rolls from tummy to back, pushes up on arms, sits with support.
 - **Social:** Laughs, babbles, responds to name.
 - **Cognitive:** Explores objects with hands and mouth, copies facial expressions.
- 7-9 Months**
 - **Physical:** Sits independently, crawls or scoots, pulls to stand.
 - **Social:** Plays peekaboo, shows stranger anxiety.
 - **Cognitive:** Understands object permanence, imitates sounds.
- 10-12 Months**
 - **Physical:** Cruises along furniture, may take first steps, uses pincer grasp.
 - **Social:** Waves "bye-bye," claps, shows preferences for toys and people.
 - **Cognitive:** Follows simple directions, says a few words like "mama" or "uh-oh".

What's Typical - and What's Not

Every baby develops at their own pace, and slight variations are normal. However, if your baby is several months behind in one or more areas—such as not sitting by 9 months or not babbling by 12 months—it's a good idea to talk to your pediatrician.

Red flags to watch for:

- No social smiling by 3 months
- No babbling or gestures by 12 months
- Not responding to sounds or voices
- Loss of previously acquired skills
- Limited movement or lack of head control

Well-baby visits are the perfect time to discuss your child's development. Bring up any concerns, even if they seem minor. Pediatricians can offer reassurance, recommend early interventions, or refer you to specialists if needed.