

# Right from the start

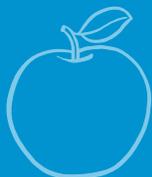


loving reading with your baby



Government  
of South Australia

SA Health



## About this book

This book has been developed to be a first “reading” experience for you and your baby. It may feel strange for you at first reading to your baby, however, with practice and time you will delight in your baby’s response.

The pictures in the book have been chosen from what research says about what babies like to look at. They have also been tried out with a group of babies. The text for parents tells you a little about why the pictures and words have been chosen. You may like to talk about each picture in your own words as well.

Reading with your baby should be fun. If your baby looks away or is not enjoying it close the book and try another time. This shows your baby that you understand how he or she is feeling and this is important for your developing relationship.

At the end of the book there are some suggestions about the kinds of books to look for as your baby gets older and where to find more information about babies.

*Fantz, R (1958). 'Pattern vision in young infants'. Psychological Records. (8), pp. 43-47.*

*McCain, M. and Mustard, J. (1999). Early Years Study: Reversing the real brain drain.*

*Ontario Children’s Secretariat: Toronto.*



## Right from the start...

The early weeks and months of a baby's life are a very special time. This is the time when the foundations for the baby's future life are laid down. It is the fastest growing time for brain and body. Patterns of learning about the world, and being a person in it, begin at this time and form the basis for all future living and learning.

Babies come into a strange new world with great potential. How they are cared for and responded to is what brings that potential to life. It makes a difference to how they grow as social beings and even to how their brains work.

Young babies need first of all to feel that the world is safe for them, in order to be able to move forward into it with confidence and courage. For this they need to be fed when they are hungry, have the right clothing for the right temperature, have a safe place to sleep and to have someone respond when they cry. Young babies take months to learn that there is anyone there to respond. If no-one comes when they cry they can feel that there is no-one to come. This is really frightening, as it would be to an adult lost in a strange new land.

They need a warm and loving person (or people) to care for and protect them. It is having this safe person (attachment person) that helps babies start to learn that they can make relationships and begin their social development.

In order to begin to know that they are individual little people they need to know that when they send messages they have been "heard" and responded to. This makes them part of a relationship and is the beginning of learning to talk. Babies "talk" to you in lots of ways, especially by smiling and looking eager, by turning away if they don't like what you are doing, and by crying when they are distressed. Each parent learns to know their own child's signals and messages.

Babies need approval and encouragement to explore and try new things. They need you to watch for and learn to know when they need help and when they can succeed in managing a new skill alone.

If babies have all these things they have the best start to living in the world, making the most of their education, getting along with others and coping with what life brings.

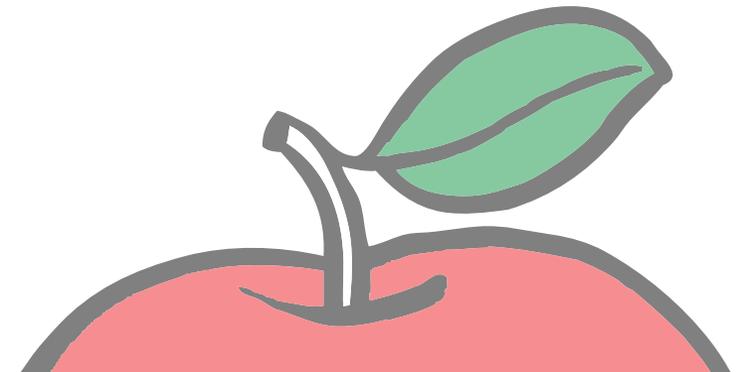
### What babies can see

Research has shown that newborn babies can see. They can see best at about 20 to 25 cm - about the distance from your face when you are holding baby in your arms. They like to look at clear pictures with strong outlines, strong colours and patterns rather than plain surfaces. They especially like to look at faces.

### What babies can hear

Very young babies will turn their heads to sounds. They especially like to hear the sound of parents' voices, even though they can't understand what you are saying. They soon learn to know their own parents' voices.

Many babies like to listen to higher pitched voices and like it when you sing to them. When you talk to your baby leave time for baby to make his or her own little noise back. When your baby "talks" to you, you can talk back by copying the sounds. These are the first conversations - the start of learning to talk.



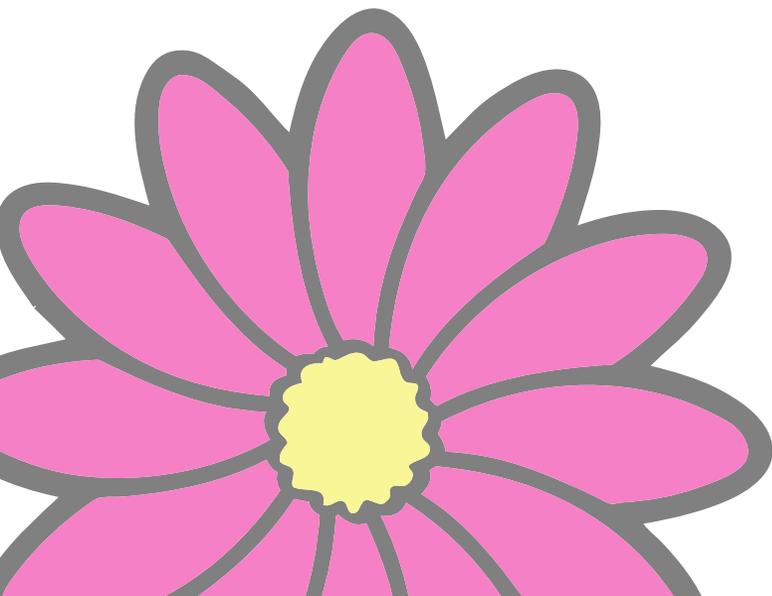


## Why babies need touch

Warm, loving touch is very important to babies' development and learning. Babies can react to touch, and pain, even before they are born. When you hold your baby gently and lovingly you are helping him or her to grow. As you get to know your baby you will learn to know what kind of touch is comforting and enjoyable and what kind of touch your baby doesn't like. For example, sometimes parents "jiggle" a baby hoping to soothe but in fact this can be quite stressful. Watch for what your baby likes and for when he or she has had enough.

## Reading with babies

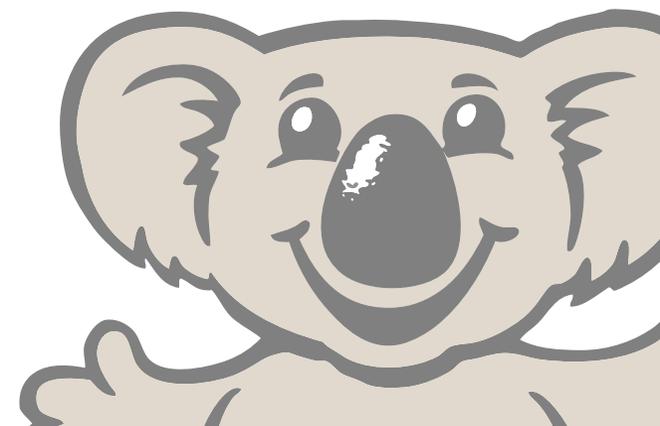
Reading with babies brings together many of the things they need most to grow and develop - closeness, safety, touch, seeing, hearing and learning about sounds as well as gradually learning what they mean. Holding your baby and sharing a book is a very special time. Babies learn that reading is important when you hold them and show them pictures in a book. They learn that reading time is a "feeling good" time. They start to learn about the world and develop their thinking skills from looking at pictures and hearing words with you.

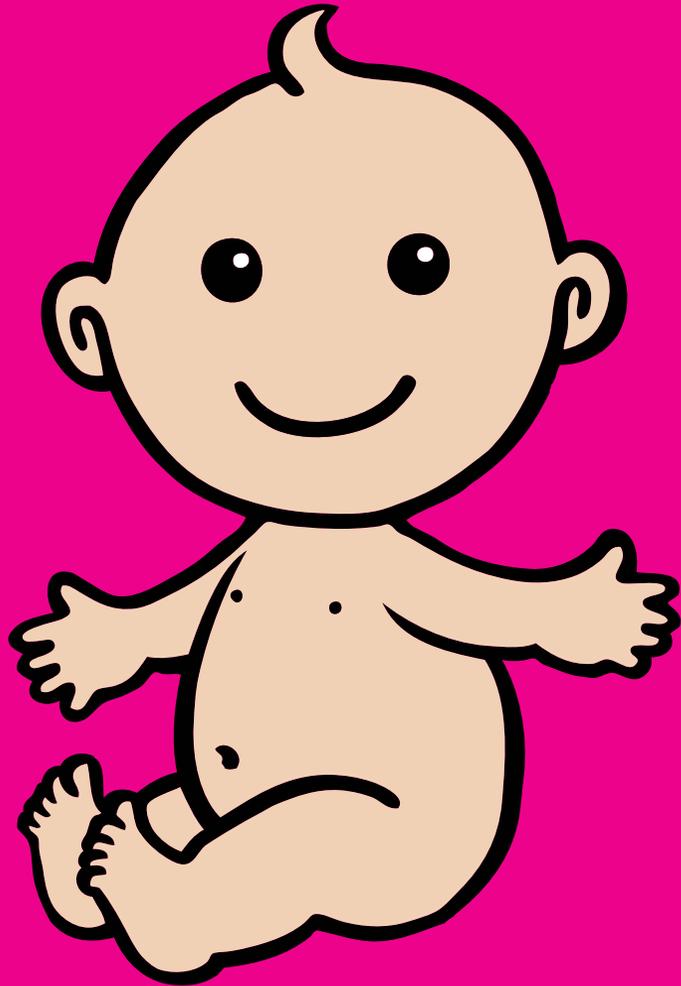


## How to read with your baby

Even if you don't like reading yourself you can enjoy this time of closeness and know that you are giving your baby an opportunity - one that you may not have had.

- > Choose a time when you are feeling relaxed and have time. Make reading time an every day time that stays special as your baby grows older.
- > Find a comfortable chair and hold your baby comfortably in your arms or on your lap.
- > Hold the book so you can both look at the pictures. Point to the pictures and say what they are. Try to change the tone of voice when you are looking at the pictures and sound really interested. "Look, here is a ball". You can use the words in the book or your own words about the picture.
- > Watch how your baby responds and shows interest in what he or she likes. "Oh-oh you like that ball?"
- > When your baby starts to shuffle around or look away or show you in some other way that he or she has had enough, stop and try again later.
- > Remember that singing and talking to your baby, long before he or she can understand the words, are very important to your baby's growing and learning.





Here is a baby

I'm glad you're here -  
you belong in our family.

The first thing we all did  
together was \_\_\_\_\_

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A feeling of belonging is one of the first needs that babies have. When you tell them things like this they are learning to feel safe and loved by the way you say it, long before they understand what you say. In a busy life, although we love our children it is easy to forget to tell them and show them that we do.



Here is a moon

I'm learning to know when  
you're sleepy.

I know you're ready to sleep  
when you \_\_\_\_\_

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Learning to know each baby's signs of what they are feeling or trying to tell you is one of the ways that helps them develop a sense of being a person, as well as being the start of two-way communication. When you put things into words for babies and young children it helps them to feel understood and safe.



Here is a smiling face

I smile at you  
because I love you.

You smile when I \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Smiling is one of first ways that babies show that they recognise their parents. Soon you will get to know the special things you do or say that make your baby smile. Happy times together start your baby on a pathway of knowing that being with people is enjoyable.

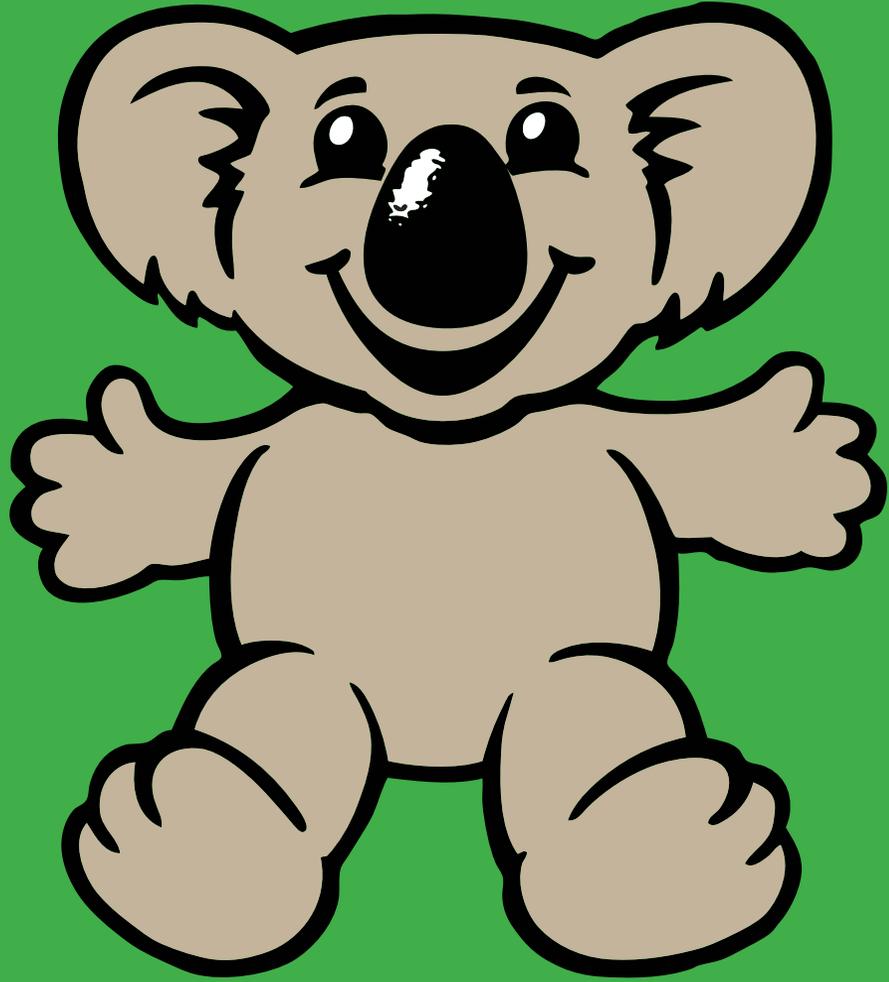


Here is a ball

Playing is learning - I know that  
you love me to play with you.

You like to play with \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Babies like best to play with parents - singing games, looking together, dancing together and touching or holding games. Playing games that a baby wants to play and enjoys, is one of the ways that babies begin to learn many things - to learn words, to learn about their bodies, how to do things and about the world. Most of all games are fun.



Here is a koala

Every day you know more about the world and we know more about you.

I know you now can \_\_\_\_\_

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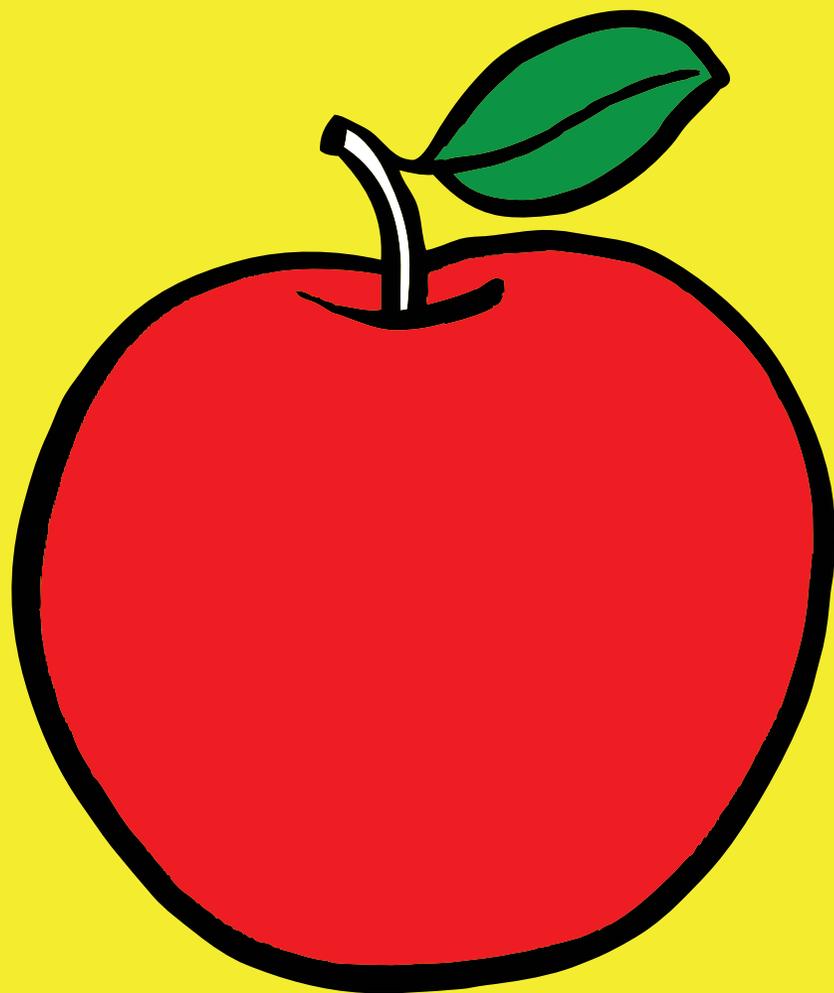
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Babies grow very quickly and learn new things every day. Watching babies and encouraging them in what they can do and what they like, helps them to learn to know who they are and to develop as unique individuals.



Here is an apple

Feeding is a yummy  
thing to do.

I know you enjoy feeding time  
when you \_\_\_\_\_

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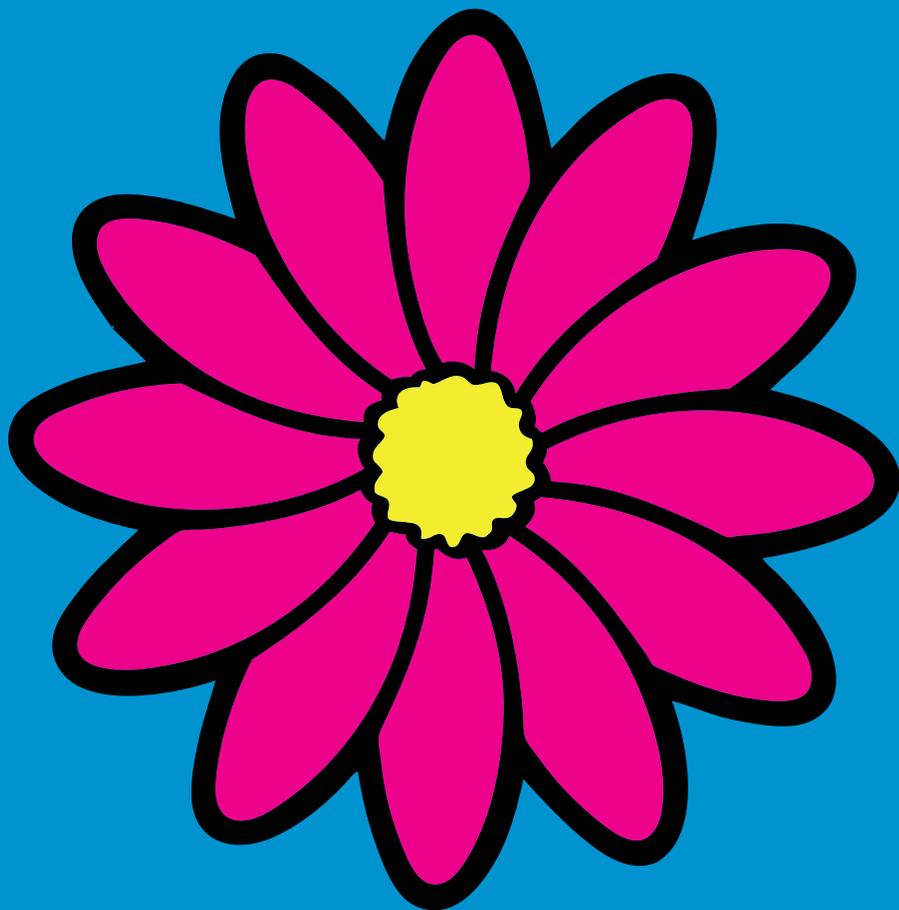
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Young babies cannot wait for food - they seem to know how important it is to nourish their bodies. Babies need to be held while they are being fed so they get the closeness and warmth that they need for their feelings as well as food for their bodies.



Here is a flower

I always want to do my best for you.

You like it when I \_\_\_\_\_

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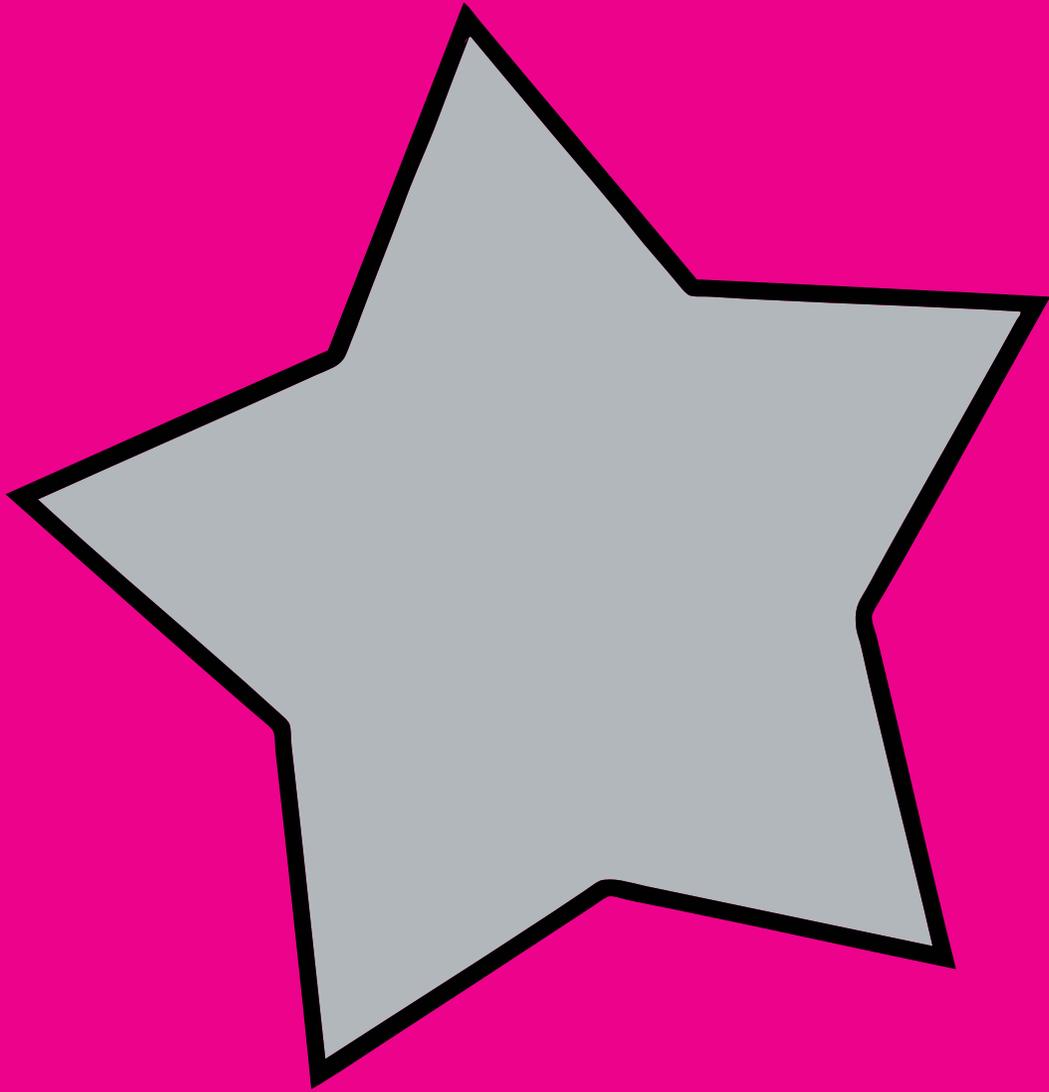
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Babies like to do the new things they need to learn in order to grow and develop. As you watch and play with babies you will know the things that they enjoy and are learning. It might just be being with you (social development), it might be books and singing (language), it might be hitting a rattle (thinking - learning about making things happen) or it might be just kicking the legs (physical). By giving babies opportunities to do what they like you are helping their development.



Here is a star

You are a  
**special star**  
in our family.

These are some of the special  
things about you \_\_\_\_\_

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One of the most important things is for babies to feel loved and lovable. This helps them to learn, in time, that they are worthwhile people and to feel safe and enjoy being with other people.

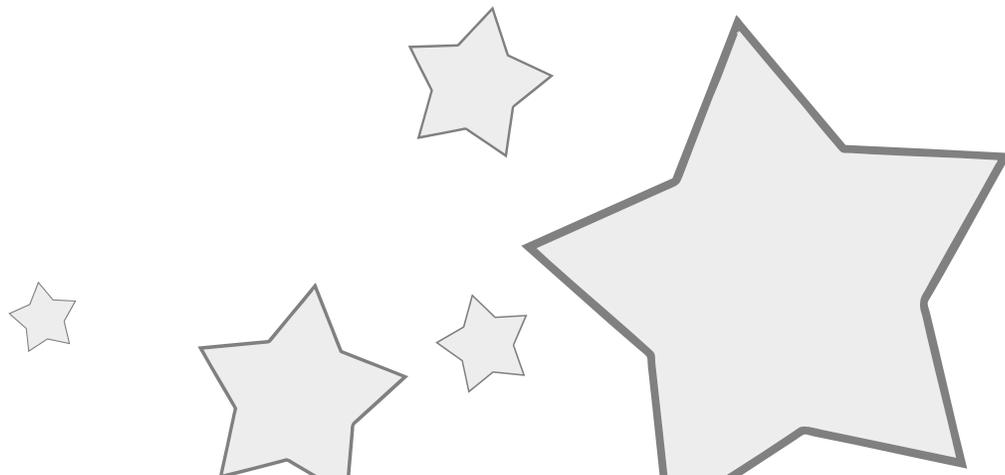
## Next steps

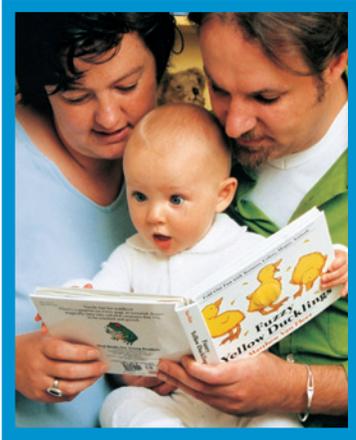
As babies get into the second half of their first year they have already learned lots of new things. They are moving around for themselves, sitting up and starting to understand lots of what you say long before they can talk. They will enjoy picture books with simple, clear and colourful pictures about things they know, such as a chair, a ball, a bath, a dog, a cat, a car. You can make the noises of animals and name things in the books and show that you enjoy reading about them. You can vary your voice to fit with the picture. Your baby may want to help you turn the pages in the book so it is best if you don't have books that are too valuable. Favourite books can become tattered and torn if they are enjoyed a lot. Think about buying a second copy.

Repeating the names of the things in the pictures and saying what they are doing helps your baby to learn more words. Babies learn through touch as well as looking and hearing. Your baby will enjoy simple finger plays, rhymes and nursery songs like "Twinkle, twinkle, little star".

## Some resources

- > There are lots of topics about babies on the website [www.cyh.com](http://www.cyh.com). You specially might like to look at "Attachment", "What are babies like?", "Living with babies", "Child Development (in the first year)", "Once upon a time", "Growing and learning with babies" and "Crying".
- > Some of these topics are available on the Parenting SA website [www.parenting.sa.gov.au](http://www.parenting.sa.gov.au). They are called Parent Easy Guides (over 70 topics) and are also available in printed form to South Australians at no cost. They can be found in many childcare centres, child health centres, some hospitals, schools, community organisations, and Parenting SA.  
Phone: (08) 8303 1660
- > Your local library children's section should have books suitable for older babies and toddlers. As babies don't always like the books parents choose, take out several and see which ones your baby likes best or ask the librarian for help. See [www.thelittlebigbookclub.com.au](http://www.thelittlebigbookclub.com.au)
- > The songs you learnt as a child and the nursery rhymes and finger plays that you or your friends know are also really worth using for babies.
- > If you are in South Australia and would like to talk to someone about any concerns you have about your baby ring the Parent Helpline on **1300 364 100** any time of the day. This is a 24 hour service of Children, Youth and Women's Health Service for the price of a local call.





### Cover photograph

Mackenzie and her parents are reading  
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Non-English speaking: for information in languages other than English, call the Interpreting and Translating Centre and ask them to call The Department of Health. This service is available at no cost to you, contact (08) 8226 1990.

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