

What can my baby and I DO TOGETHER IN HOSPITAL?



An admission to hospital may mean your baby's opportunities to play are more limited. Providing play in this new environment can provide familiarity, reassurance and normality to your child. Play in hospital can help your baby maintain their development and achieve new developmental goals. Most importantly, it will help make their stay a happy one, which may aid their recovery.



This toolkit aims to give you some ideas as to what you and your baby can do together in hospital.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

- 1 Your baby may love playing with toys but their favourite activity will be playing and interacting with you.
- 2 Pay attention to your baby's cues and non-verbal communication which will indicate when they want to play and want to stop.
- 3 Your baby will need time to rest, so think about creating a balance between play and calm, relaxing time.
- 4 If your baby has had surgery or a procedure, you may need to adapt the toys or games that you play with your baby. Your nurse and play specialist will help you with how to adapt the toys you have, and can give you ideas for games you can play with your baby.



0 to 3 months

What your baby might be starting to do:

- Babies love to look at happy faces.
- Babies love to look at moving things.
- Babies can see things more clearly now (their optimum focus is 30cm away or closer).
- Babies love to listen to voices and music.
- Babies love to make noises.
- Babies are fascinated by hands and feet.

What you can do:

- Talk and sing to your baby and tell them how beautiful they are.
- Look directly at your baby and let them look at your face.
- Read stories to your baby.
- Sing songs and nursery rhymes to your baby.
- Gently massage your baby's hands and feet.
- If possible, hold your baby.
- Provide your baby with a quiet space if they are tired.



Activities

0 to 3 months

Talk to your baby as much as you can. Tell them what you are doing when you dress, bathe or feed them. You can also just chat about what is happening around you on the ward. Incorporate songs into this routine, such as 'this is the way we...' to reassure and provide fun.

Explanation – Your baby is starting to learn the sound of your voice and also about language.

Tickling games are a fun way to get to know your baby. Walk your fingers up your baby's body from their feet to their tummy and end with a little gentle tickle. Talk to your baby whilst doing this as the tone of your voice lets your baby know it is fun.

Explanation – You are learning to be sensitive to your baby's reactions.

Creating a happy faces book. Your baby loves to look at faces so make your baby their own book created from pictures of the people they love the most, their family. Ask the play specialist for help with materials.

Explanation – Your baby is learning to recognise faces.

Tactile hand games. Lay your baby on their back and gently bring their hands together at midline. Try gently tapping their face and lips with their hands; these are the most sensitive part of the body. Kiss and count your babies fingers. Give your baby a fiddle cloth.

Explanation – you are encouraging your baby's awareness of hands and also to engage in finger and mouth play (this can be especially useful for tube fed babies).

Sensory play. Let your baby experience sensory toys such as light up gyms, rope lights or toys that make noises. This type of play is tiring for babies so be guided by your babies reaction and leave lights on no longer than 30 minutes.

Explanation – you are helping to make your baby feel safe and at ease within the hospital environment, as long as you don't over stimulate them.

3 to 6 months

What your baby might be starting to do:

- Babies like to make noises.
- Babies like to move and reach for things.
- Babies have better eye sight and can start to track movements.
- Babies can start to respond to their reflection in a mirror.
- Babies like to move their legs and arms when they are excited.
- Babies like to turn their heads to the direction of familiar noise.

What you can do:

- Find some toys your baby can bang together to create sounds.
- Try alternating hanging toys on your baby gym to encourage your baby to reach.
- If your baby coos, respond to them as they are trying to communicate with you.
- Follow your baby's lead; if they turn away, then they are indicating to you that they are tired or want to do something else.
- When your baby gazes and smiles, respond to them by smiling and gazing back.



Activities

3 to 6 months

Safety mirrors can be used in play and give lots of opportunities for you to talk to your baby.

Explanation – babies love to look at faces and will be intrigued by discovering their own.

Use baby mats for texture exploration. Place your baby on a play mat in their cot or in a safe place on the floor. When possible, try to lie your baby in different positions, on their back or on their tummy, always supervise this activity and check with the ward staff if this is suitable for your baby before play time.

Explanation – Your baby is having fun discovering new things whilst you are learning about your baby's cues and becoming familiar with how to respond to them.

Shake rattles to one side of your baby's head and watch as they turn towards the sound.

Explanation – Your baby's sense of hearing is good so use rattles to encourage movement.

A tracking game of blowing bubbles is good, as your baby can track the bubbles and reach for them.

Explanation – tracking games are a good way to encourage movement.

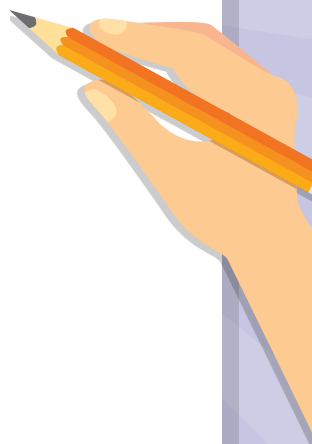
6 to 12 months

What your baby might be starting to do:

- Your baby is getting stronger and starting to move independently which offers lots of fun opportunities for play.
- Your baby might make different sounds and start to imitate others.
- Your baby can start to recognise words for certain things, such as teddy.
- Your baby might react when you leave because your baby prefers you to strangers.
- Your baby can start to express more emotions.

What you can do:

- Hug or stroke your baby when you have to leave them and again on your return, this will help your baby understand that you will come back.
- When your baby smiles, cries, points their finger or turns away, try to understand what it is your baby wants.



Activities

6 to 12 months

Baby gyms can be placed inside the cot. You can change the hanging toys, so try alternating these to stimulate your baby.

Explanation – baby gyms are a good way to entertain babies restricted to lying in their cot. They encourage movement, stimulate curiosity and are safe for your baby to play with alone.

Show your baby board books, especially small ones they can hold themselves. Look for ones with large clear colourful pictures. Subjects that are good are animals, so that you can make the appropriate animal noises, and familiar experiences such as mealtimes and bath time.

Explanation – these topics will help your baby develop their communication skills and their understanding of routines.

Peek-a-boo. Place your hands over your face, then, open them and say boo! Repeat several times. Vary this game by peeping round the sides of your hands or around a corner.

Explanation – this game is great fun and helps your baby develop an understanding of permanency of objects.

If possible, sit your baby on their baby mat, support your baby and create a small play area of their favourite toys. Also use this space for playing action nursery rhymes together such as horsey horsey and the wheels on the bus.

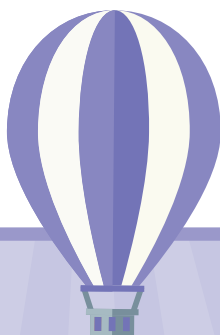
Explanation – this allows your baby safe exploration of their surroundings and encourages their strength and movement.

WHAT SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE?

Throughout the hospital you will find play specialists and play assistants, who can provide advice and support through play for you and your baby and any siblings who may be visiting the hospital. Please see the hospital website or see the play department leaflet for details.

<http://www.nahps.org.uk/>

There are lots of nursery rhymes and apps online that you are welcome to look at and use to sing songs with your baby.



These toolkits have been written by NHS clinical psychologists and neuropsychologists working for University Hospitals Bristol. They have been co-designed with service users and healthcare staff. These toolkits are only intended to provide general advice and information. Please discuss your individual needs with your doctor or specialist nurse. If you would like more information about psychology services please go to:

<http://www.uhbristol.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/support-for-patients/psychological-health-services/>

We would like to thank patients and other healthcare staff for their contributions to this toolkit.

For access to other patient toolkits please go to the following address:

<http://www.uhbristol.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/support-for-patients/psychological-health-services/resources/>

For this leaflet in large print, audio or PDF format, please email patientleaflets@uhbristol.nhs.uk

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| Published: 05/10/18 | Expires: 31/10/21 | DOTS/PHS/TLKTP/PLAY/OCT18 |

