

Babies Learn from Reading Faces

During a baby's first year of life, he will learn how to handle new situations by reading his parent's face. Researchers call this skill social referencing.



Babies are constantly involved in new situations. They often come in contact with objects and people who are not familiar.

At about 1 year, babies can interpret the emotions they see on a parent's face. They know that certain facial expressions and tones of voice mean something. It may mean, "Stop, don't do that," or "It's OK, go ahead and play." They will respond to a certain situation depending upon the parent's emotional reaction.

During the first year of life, babies use "social referencing." In a new situation, a young baby (6 – 9 months) looks to his mother to make sure she is nearby. He is not too concerned about his

mother's facial reaction. He just wants mom nearby. However, babies 10 to 13 months old use their mother's facial expressions to make decisions about new situations and objects.

Your face will tell your child how you feel. Your baby constantly watches and learns from you. Help your baby learn the important skills of reading faces and emotions.

- Have fun face-to-face time with your baby. Let her see your facial expressions. Babies love to see faces. Notice how she smiles when you smile and frowns when you frown.
- Provide clear examples of your emotions. If your

child approaches something dangerous, say "no" and give a stern look. If it is OK for your baby to play with something new, say "OK" and give her a happy look. You can also nod your head for yes and shake your head back and forth for no.

- Use positive emotions as you introduce your baby to new objects, food and people.

This seems like a very simple concept, but your baby learns by watching you. You are your baby's first teacher. It is crucial for you to talk to and interact with your baby. This keeps your child safe and healthy.

Call the Parent Help Line. We listen. We can find you help.
1-217-544-5808 or 1-888-727-5889 from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., 7 days a week
or log onto www.parenthelpline.org