

Promoting development: four months to one year

At four months old, your baby should be grasping and transferring objects between their hands. Be watching everything going on and following movement. They will be laughing at things you do to stimulate them. Give your baby lots of time on the floor, a play mat or blanket with toys around them to reach for. They are interested in grabbing things which make noise, be it crinkly paper or material, things that squeak and have rattles in. Your baby should be trying to roll to one side then back. When on their tummy, they should hold their head and shoulders clear from the floor and their legs are kicking out at the back of them. It looks like they're almost balancing on their tummies.

Babies can do different things between six months and one year with regard to developing their big movements (gross motor skills). They could crawl, but not all babies do. They can be on their knees, on all fours or crawl like a soldier dragging their bodies with their arms and legs low to the floor. Some babies are happy to sit or roll around. Some babies move backwards to start with. Other babies will pull to stand and walk around holding onto furniture and bypass the crawling stage. Babies can have short 20-minute sessions in things like non-rolling activity centres. Baby walkers with wheels, which babies sit in, are not recommended. If your baby uses a door bouncer, they also need to be watched carefully whilst they're in it to ensure they don't bang into anything. For example, doorframes or covered edges.

Small movements, fine motor skills and problem solving

Small movements such as picking something up between a finger and a thumb requires more control than picking something up with your whole hand and takes practice. Shape sorters, posting activities, transferring toys from one box to another can all encourage this. Toys which ask the baby to pull, push, turn and press help develop these skills. Show them how to do things, encourage them to keep trying. When they get it right give them lots of smiles and cuddles.

Turn everyday things into a game. Start to help them understand the place of things, is it in, on, under, in front of or behind something? Play hide and seek with objects they know under tea towels. Stacking cups are a great all round toy.

Your baby should be making lots of tuneful sounds, copying noises you make like coughing, blowing raspberries, lip smacking. This is a great time to join a parent and toddler group. Music, books and talking are all important to your baby at this time. They learn quickly about their world. Their brain should have developed all the building blocks for language by nine months old. The more you talk and read to your baby, the more language they are learning. Don't worry if English isn't your first language, your baby will pick up English as they go.