

## SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN INFANTS

Infants are born with social instincts. They like to be held, talked to, and looked at. Some research shows that newborns even move their bodies to the rhythm of human speech. Infants also recognize social messages by the manner in which they are held and talked to. Infants also send social messages or communication back to others by way of cooing, smiling, and crying. Study after study has shown that social interactions and messages the infant receives during the first few months of life are vital in preparing the infant for a productive and socially and emotionally happy life. In these studies, they found that infants who were kissed, held, and comforted by their parents and caregivers were happier and healthier. Infants who are quickly calmed and soothed when they cry are also happier and healthier.

Around three to four weeks after birth, the infant begins to smile knowingly at parents and siblings. By the fourth to sixth month, infants can distinguish between strange and familiar faces. This is called stranger anxiety and is related to cognitive and emotional development. By the time an infant can crawl, he/she begins to initiate social behavior and contact. It is common for a 7- to 9-month-old to follow a parent or sibling around the house trying to get them to pick him/her up.

Research has also shown that infants do best with a mother figure and a father figure in the home. The study says that infants prefer their fathers over their mothers during play time. This is because fathers play more types of rough-and-tumble play. They play games that are new to the infant as well as making variations in the old games the infant is used to. Fathers also allow their infants to explore more, according to the study. Mothers are preferred over fathers during times of stress, such as when the infant is tired or sick or afraid of something.

During the first year of life, the infant is learning to trust the world around him/her and the people in it. This is Erik Erikson's age of trust versus mistrust. The best way to help the infant develop trust is to have consistency in his/her life. Meeting the infant's basic needs as quickly as possible, like changing diapers, feeding, etc., can help him/her learn trust. Having a routine or schedule for daily activities helps. Keeping the infant's environment as consistent as possible and making changes from the routine or environment as gradual as possible are important for the infant to feel secure. If the infant does not develop a relationship of trust with his/her parents and caregivers, he/she learns to mistrust others and the world. The world provides many disappointments and problems if a child has not learned to trust.

Following is a trust versus mistrust cycle. This is a visual display of Erikson's theory of an infant developing trust or mistrust.

