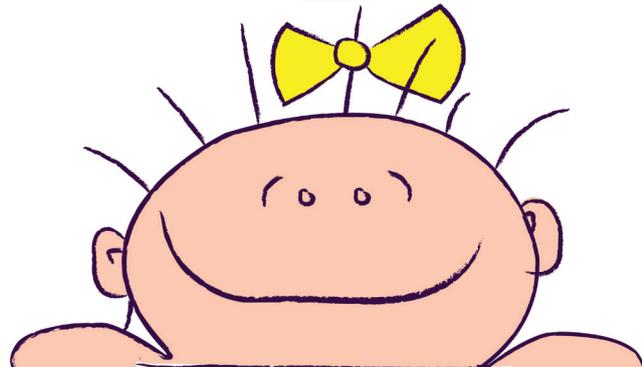


# the best start in life for your child



Five ways to support the development of your baby's emotional health and wellbeing.

**Congratulations on  
becoming a parent!**



*\*In this booklet babies are referred to as 'he'.*

Your baby's early years, from conception to 3 years, are deeply significant as his brain is developing every minute of every day. His experience of life during his first few years directly relates to how his mental and emotional health will develop into adolescence and adulthood.

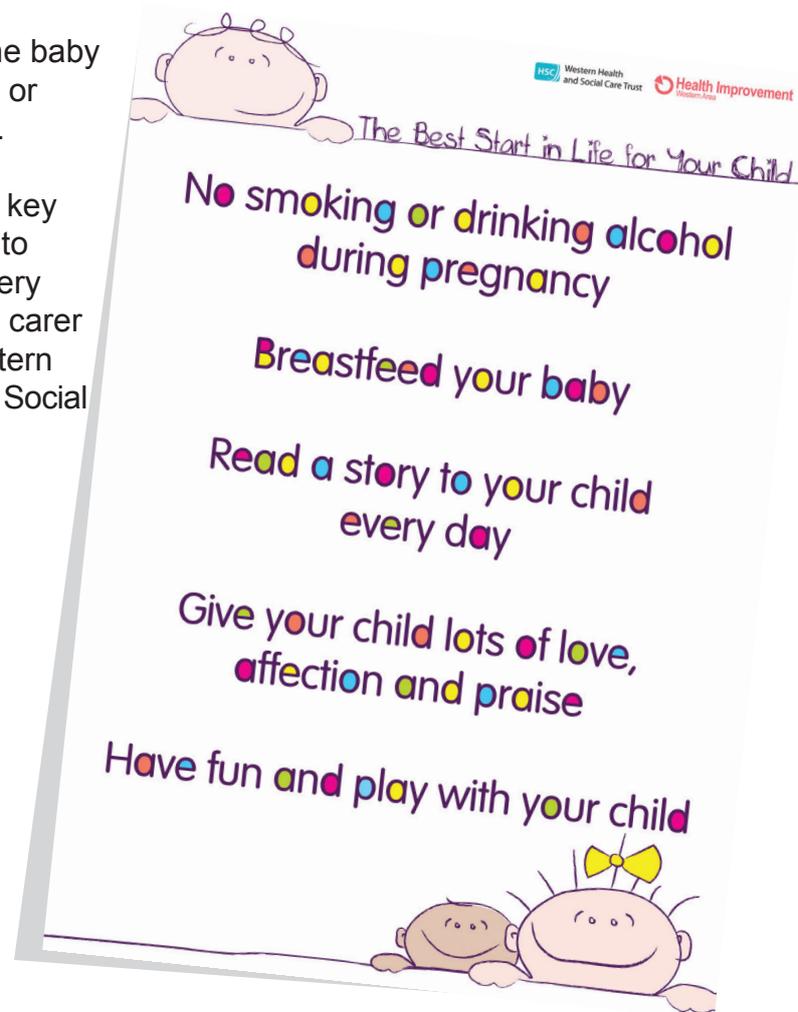
**"Give me the child and I will show you the man,"**

St Ignatius Loyola

The easiest and most important way to nurture and develop positive mental and emotional wellbeing in babies and young children is through the relationship

between the baby and parent or main carer.

Here are 5 key messages to support every parent and carer in the Western Health and Social Care Trust (WHSCCT).



## 4 The best start in life for your child

With the right support during these early years our children are more likely to experience and benefit from:

- Being able to form long term loving relationships
- Better brain development and improved academic achievement
- Being less at risk of mental ill health
- Being less at risk of dependence on drug and/or alcohol use
- Being less at risk of eating disorders

- **Being less likely to show anti-social, violent and aggressive behaviour**

- **Being able to show empathy and have compassion for others**

These 5 key messages will help to support every baby through their journey from childhood into adult life.



## Happy parent, happy child

As a parent or carer you have a vital and privileged role in parenting your child. However it is also important to look after your own mental and emotional wellbeing. According to Dr Suzanne Zeedyk<sup>1</sup> babies arrive already connected. Babies are very good at picking up on emotional states. This is their language.

Make time for yourself each day. Do things that make you happy and help you unwind, even 5 minutes a day can make a big difference to how you feel.

There are lots of ways you can look after your own mental and emotional health and well-being:

### Nurture yourself

Look after your physical and emotional needs, eat a balanced diet, try to get as much sleep as you can, e.g. sleep when baby sleeps, be active, take time out to recharge your energy. Seek support if you feel overwhelmed or exhausted with parenting.

### Nurture your relationships

How are you feeling? Share your thoughts with your partner, close friends or another family member. Supportive relationships are essential for your wellbeing. A problem shared is a problem halved.

Be sociable with your baby, find out about local parent and baby groups that you can attend; this is a great way to meet other parents who understand what it is like to be a parent.

## No smoking or drinking alcohol during pregnancy

In every culture the mother to be is encouraged to become physically and emotionally prepared for pregnancy, birth and motherhood. This includes stopping smoking and abstaining from alcohol.

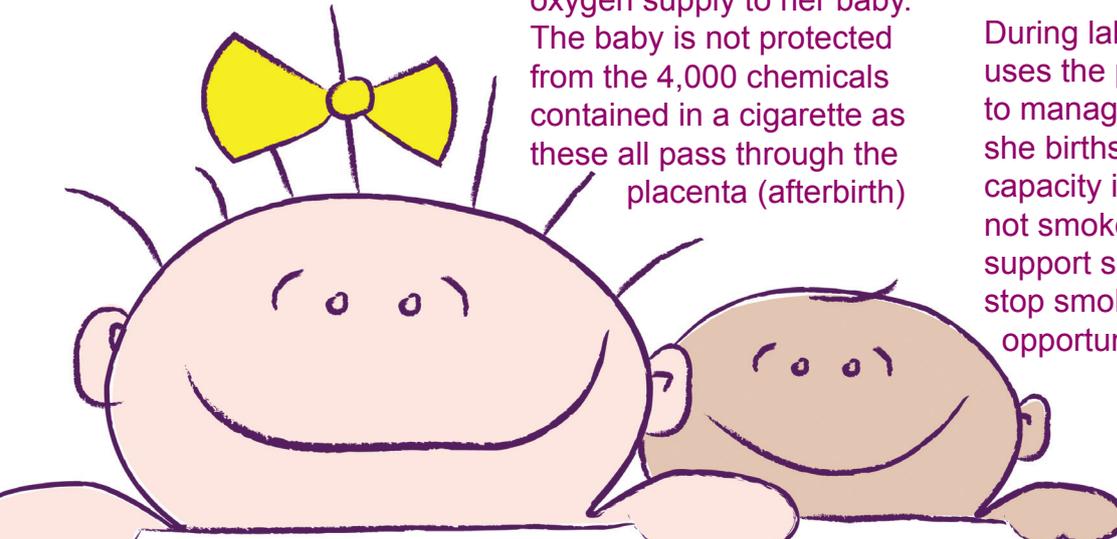
### Smoking

Everyone knows that smoking is bad for us; it is especially toxic for the unborn baby. When a pregnant woman smokes each cigarette restricts oxygen supply to her baby. The baby is not protected from the 4,000 chemicals contained in a cigarette as these all pass through the placenta (afterbirth)

and affect the baby's growth and development.

This is why babies born to smokers can be underweight and more vulnerable to infections.

During labour, the mother uses the power of her breath to manage the surges as she births her baby. Lung capacity is greater if you do not smoke. There is a lot of support services to help you stop smoking. This is a good opportunity to stop smoking.



## Alcohol

The UK Chief Medical Officer states that *“If you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, the safest approach is not to drink alcohol at all, to keep risks to your baby to a minimum”*<sup>2</sup>

Women who find out they are pregnant after already having drunk alcohol during early pregnancy should avoid further drinking.

There is clear evidence to show that during pregnancy no alcohol should be consumed. Drinking alcohol

when pregnant increases the risk of miscarriage, learning disabilities, growth restriction and failure to catch up with children of a similar age.

**So for this reason, no alcohol when pregnant is the best and safest choice.**

**For further information** contact your local GP or Midwife for more support.

[www.communitypharmacyni.co.uk](http://www.communitypharmacyni.co.uk)

Smokers Helpline 0808 812 8008 [www.want2stop.info](http://www.want2stop.info)

Alcohol and drug services

- 028 7186 5239
- 028 7186 5240
- 028 6638 2073

Addiction support: 028 7186 0086 or 028 8225 3950

Drinkline: 0800 917 8282

## Breastfeed your baby

Have you thought about how you are going to feed your baby? Here are some things to consider about the benefits of breastfeeding. Breastfeeding can be really rewarding and the hormones that a breastfeeding mum produces help with developing a close and loving relationship.

As the baby's immune system is not up and running at birth, just by kissing her baby, Mum picks up any germs on the baby's skin and her body naturally blends her breastmilk to contain specific antibodies and hormones to protect

the baby against disease which help strengthen the baby's immune system. So at each breastfeed, the baby receives a top up of unique breastmilk tailored to meet their health needs.

These antibodies and special immune boosting factors help to protect a breastfed baby from a range of infections and health conditions including:

- Allergies
- Chest and ear infections
- Constipation
- Diabetes

- Heart disease
- Overweight/ obesity in later childhood

Breastfeeding has also significant benefits for mothers, including a lower risk of osteoporosis, type 2 diabetes and female cancers (breast, uterine and ovarian); and women who breastfeed their children are able to lose weight gained during pregnancy more easily.<sup>3</sup>

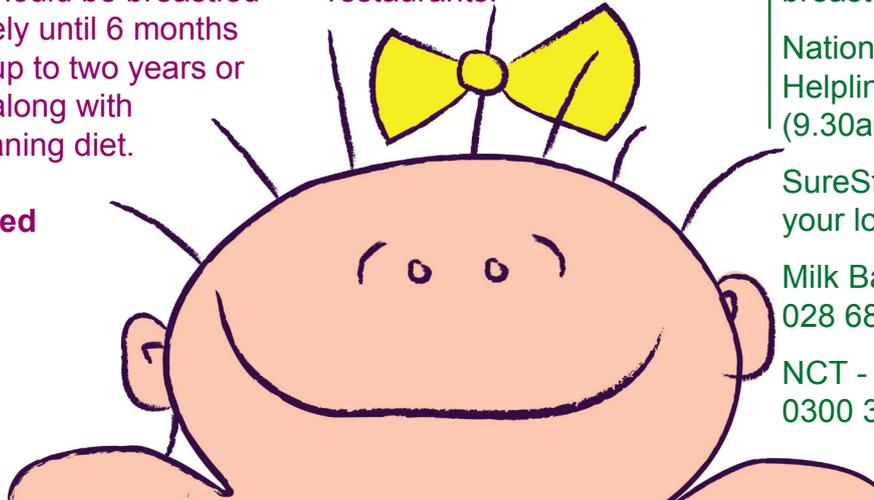
Breast milk is convenient as you do not have to get up in the middle of the night to prepare bottles. It's also free.

Breast milk provides all the nutrition a baby needs for the first six months of its life. It is easy to digest so puts no stress on the baby's digestive system.

The **current advice** is that babies should be breastfed exclusively until 6 months old and up to two years or beyond along with their weaning diet.

**Every feed counts.**

However we know that the longer a baby is breastfed the greater the health benefits and any breastfeeding will benefit the baby. Look out for the breastfeeding friendly logo in lots of local cafes and restaurants.



**For further information** contact your Midwife or Health Visitor.

For information on support groups and trained breastfeeding support volunteers go to [www.breastfedbabies.org](http://www.breastfedbabies.org)

National Breastfeeding Helpline: 0300 100 0212 (9.30am-9.30pm)

SureStart – see page 16 for your local SureStart contact

Milk Bank Irvinestown  
028 6862 8333

NCT - [www.nct.org.uk](http://www.nct.org.uk) or  
0300 330 0700

## Read a story to your child every day

Start talking, singing and reading to your baby even before he is born! Reading is a great way to help develop your baby's speech, language and communication skills. "Speech, language and communication skills are fundamental to the development of learning, and social and emotional well-being and are essential to support the development of skills for life and work."<sup>4</sup>

Have fun sharing a book or story with your child.

Children often have favourite stories that will be repeated over and over again. This helps build memory skills such as remembering words or phrases from the book.



Sharing a book with your child helps to develop empathy and emotional intelligence as the more words he learns and understands the better he is able to communicate his thoughts and feelings. Reading together also deepens attachment as it provides special one on one time between you and your child.

Help develop your baby's motor skills by letting him turn the pages.

It's best to read little and often, so try to put aside some time for it every day. Bedtime is perfect as reading can become part of the bedtime routine which helps children settle down and unwind.

Quiet and focused reading time helps to develop your child's listening skills and concentration. So turn off your TV, mobile and radio to give your child your full attention.

**For further information:**

[www.bookstart.org.uk](http://www.bookstart.org.uk)

[www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk](http://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk)

[www.literacytrust.org.uk/talk\\_to\\_your\\_baby](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/talk_to_your_baby)

[www.ni-libraries.net](http://www.ni-libraries.net)

[www.nidirect.gov.uk/education-works](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/education-works)

SureStart: Details pg 16

Adult literacy "Essential Skills Literacy" courses: Limavady or Londonderry: 028 7127 6080

Strabane: 028 7127 6080

Omagh or Enniskillen:  
084 5603 1881

## Give your child lots of love, affection and praise

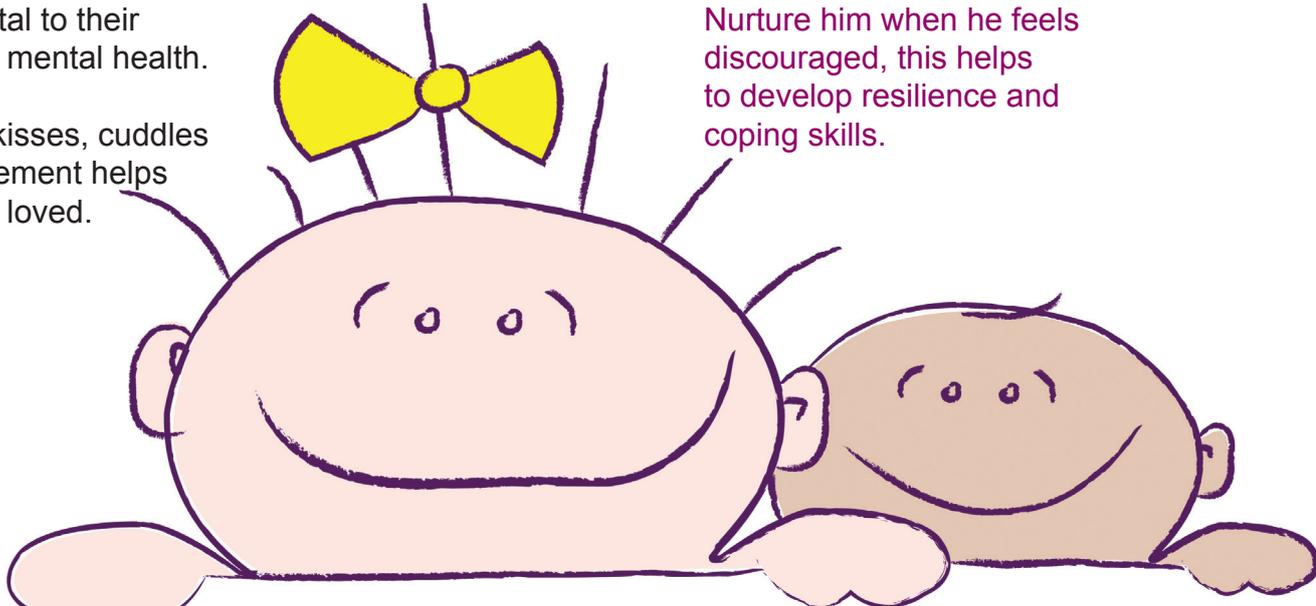
Babies and children need lots of love, affection and praise to develop into happy, confident children. Developing a loving and supportive relationship with your child is vital to their emotional and mental health.

Giving lots of kisses, cuddles and encouragement helps your baby feel loved.

Trust your instincts: responding quickly to your baby's cries will not 'spoil' him but make him feel safe and loved and help him grow up to be secure and happy.

Praise your child when they achieve things, specific and earned praise builds optimism, self-esteem and confidence in their abilities.

Nurture him when he feels discouraged, this helps to develop resilience and coping skills.



'Serve and return' is another way to describe how you can respond to your baby's noises and facial expressions to open up and develop a fun and relaxed communication style together.

Children thrive when loving and consistent parenting has boundaries and daily routines. This approach promotes a child's feelings of safety and emotional security.

Find ways that you enjoy spending time with your child and your child enjoys

spending time with you. This will improve the quality of your relationship and result in a happier child and happier parent.

Bonding or attachment is when your baby uses you or their main caregiver as a secure base from which they feel safe and comfortable to explore.<sup>5</sup>

This attachment bond has many positive outcomes for your baby's social-emotional development throughout their life.<sup>6</sup>

### **For further information**

contact your local GP, Midwife or Health Visitor.

SureStart: Details pg 16

WEST: Derry 028 7186 5265, Omagh 028 8283 5844

[www.familysupportni.gov.uk](http://www.familysupportni.gov.uk)  
0845 600 6483

[www.parentingni.org](http://www.parentingni.org)  
Helpline 0808 8010 722

Action For Children  
028 7132 9444/028 6632 4181

NI Newpin: 028 7134 4477

Early Years: 028 9066 2825,  
[www.early-years.org](http://www.early-years.org)

[www.bhf.org.uk/childrens-resources/for-parents.aspx](http://www.bhf.org.uk/childrens-resources/for-parents.aspx)

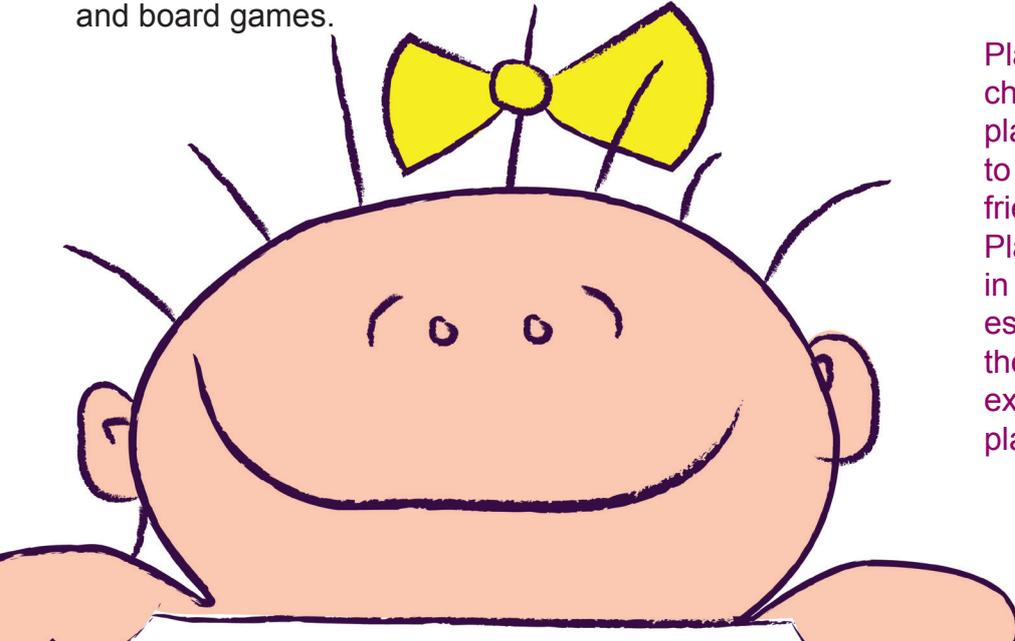
## Have fun and play with your child

Babies and children love it when you play with them. Play can include physical games like hide and seek, pretend play, painting, crafts, and board games.

Babies are encouraged to enjoy “tummy time”, little and often. Parents should get down onto the floor with their baby and use toys and books

to interact. Tummy time develops back, neck and shoulder muscles which are important to aid the crawling and sitting stage.

Play is the true work of childhood.<sup>7</sup> Through play, children learn how to problem-solve, make friends and communicate. Play is fun when you join in too, nothing is more essential and rewarding than the enjoyment your child experiences from time spent playing with you.<sup>7</sup>



There is so much learning during play. Children are lifting, dropping, looking, pouring, bouncing, hiding, building, counting, knocking down, and more.

Reduce the risk of overweight or obesity in children by encouraging active play from birth. The current physical activity guidelines recommend minimising the amount of time babies and children spend sitting or restrained in things like car seats, buggies or high chairs.

By age 3 children who are capable of walking unaided should be physically active daily for at least 180 minutes (3 hours) spread throughout the day.<sup>8</sup>

Lots of parents find that their child is able to release a lot of emotional energy by being physically active which helps them to manage their mood, emotions and supports a good night sleep.

### For further information:

[www.safefood.eu](http://www.safefood.eu)

[www.getalifegetactive.com](http://www.getalifegetactive.com)

SureStart: Details pg 16

Get involved because education works - [www.nidirect.gov.uk/education-works](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/education-works)

## Additional support services for parents

Lifeline: **0808 808 8000**

### **SureStart**

Little Hands SureStart  
(Creevagh, Springtown and  
Rosemount)

**028 7126 7524**

### Dry Arch SureStart

(The Highlands, Dungiven,  
Feeny, Upper Glenshane,  
Glack, Colessan and  
Greystone) **028 7774 2904**

### Edenballymore SureStart

(Brandywell, The Diamond,  
Westland, Strand, Beechwood,  
Creggan Central and  
Creggan South)

**028 7137 1670**

Family Centre and  
SureStart Shantallow  
(Shantallow East, Shantallow  
West, Carnhill and Culmore  
area)

**028 7135 2522**

### Strabane Family Centre and SureStart

(North, South, East, West,  
Ballycolman, Sion Mills,  
Finn, Dunnamanagh,  
Plumbridge)

**028 7138 2658**

### Waterside SureStart

(Victoria, Ebrington,  
Clondermott and Enagh)

**028 7134 7186**

### Cherish SureStart

(Irvinestown, Kesh, Ederney  
and Lack, Lisnarrick,  
Ballinamallard, Trillick,  
Devenish, Rosslea and  
Newtownbutler)

**028 6862 1970**

### Rainbow SureStart

(Castledearg, Glenderg,  
Clare, Drumquin and  
Newtownstewart)

**028 8167 9438**

### Last SureStart

(Lisanelly, Drumragh,  
Killyclogher, Camowen,  
Strule, Fintona, Termon)

**028 8225 2936**

[www.early-years.org](http://www.early-years.org)  
Northwest **028 7131 3004**  
Enniskillen **028 6634 2696**  
Kesh **028 6863 3098**

[www.familysupportni.gov.uk](http://www.familysupportni.gov.uk)  
**0845 600 6483**

[www.parentingni.org](http://www.parentingni.org) or  
Parents helpline **0808 8010**  
**722** or **028 7137 2006**

Action For Children  
**028 7132 9444**  
**028 6632 4181**

[www.gingerbreadni.org](http://www.gingerbreadni.org)  
**028 7137 7066**  
**0808 808 8090**

NI Newpin: **028 7134 4477**

[www.womensaidni.org](http://www.womensaidni.org)  
Foyle **028 7128 0060**  
Fermanagh **028 6632 8898**  
Omagh **028 8224 1414**

[www.home-start.org.uk](http://www.home-start.org.uk)  
Lifestart Foundation Head  
office: **028 7136 5363**  
Limavady: **028 7776 5438**  
Enniskillen: **028 6632 0290**  
Ballymagroarty / Hazelbank  
/ Coshquin (Derry):  
**028 7126 9833**  
Strabane: **028 7188 5504**

[www.netmums.com](http://www.netmums.com)



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