

Infants & Toddlers

a letter to families

NOTE TO TEACHERS: COPY THIS PAGE AND SEND HOME TO PARENTS.

You have probably noticed how much your baby loves to be gently touched by you! You have seen your baby's reflex responses to your touch, such as curling her little hand around your finger if you press your finger firmly into her palm. Here are some suggestions for ways you can provide comfort, and help your baby grow, through the power of touch.

Some babies have very sensitive skin. Babies learn to trust a parent whose gentle caresses they count on to soothe and heal skin irritations. When you bathe your baby, have you noticed that you need to make the water temperature just warm enough for your baby to feel comfortable? Babies adjust more easily to a bath when you set the temperature so that it's "just right" for them.

Nurturing touches are powerful ways to convey love and to stimulate physical growth. If your baby is small at birth, try to use "kangaroo" baby care. Kangaroo pouches are available at different prices. They fit comfortably over your shoulder and permit you to snuggle your baby close to your body. This way he can feel the warmth as well as the feel of your body

movements. This kind of close touch is particularly important to promote growth in premature infants.

Babies love a back rub. They love a daily massage with nonallergenic oils. Your loving caresses signal security and comfort to your baby. They also permit the skin to release chemicals that promote growth. Keep your touches gentle and generous. They convey powerful messages of love to your precious child.

Share your observations about your baby's responses to touch with his teacher. If he needs more cuddling, or much firmer touches, discuss this so that together you can meet her needs for touching ways that suit her best.

Alice Sterling Honig, Ph.D., a professor emerita of child development at Syracuse University, is the author of many books, including Secure Relationships: Nurturing Infant-Toddler Attachments in Early Care Settings (NAEYC, 2002; \$15) and, with H. Brophy, Talking With Your Baby: Family as the First School (Syracuse University Press, 1996; \$16.95).