

6. Infant mental health

Infant mental health refers to the behavioural and social development of children from birth to the age of three. Research has shown that babies are born biologically programmed to seek contact and to form relationships. The care giver is the baby's first relationship, and **first relationships matter**. Parents may be surprised to discover that their baby is drawn to their face, their voice and their smell and indeed craves physical contact. Encourage parents to follow their baby's cues and to talk and sing to their baby. These behaviours help them to form a strong attachment or bond with their baby.

The Newborn Clinical Exam can be used as an opportunity to demonstrate this to the parent, encouraging early relationship building strategies such as following the baby's cues, talking, singing to, and holding their baby. These behaviours help them to form a strong attachment or bond with their baby.

7. Health promotion

The newborn clinical examination is a wonderful opportunity for a healthcare professional to engage and involve parents in the health of their newborn baby, and to offer opportunistic health promotion.

Messages that can be delivered at this time include:

- ◆ The importance of breastfeeding
- ◆ Nutrition and weaning
- ◆ SIDS prevention
- ◆ Prevention of accidents and injuries
- ◆ Immunisations
- ◆ Recognition of illness



Key messages for all the contact points

Smoking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Tobacco smoke harms your baby's health and increases their risk of dying from cot death. ✓ Protect your baby by eliminating exposure of your baby to second hand smoke by making your house and car smoke free and don't allow anyone to smoke around your baby.
Breastfeeding, nutrition and weaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Your breastmilk gives your baby all the nutrients they need for around the first 6 months (26 weeks). ✓ Every breastfeed makes a difference. ✓ The HSE website www.breastfeeding.ie provides lots of useful information and there are experts available online to answer your queries. ✓ If you choose not to breastfeed your baby (or are unable to breastfeed or to express milk) a 'first milk'/standard infant formula should be the sole source of nutrition for up to 6 months (26 weeks).
SIDS prevention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Always place your baby on their back to sleep, even for naps. ✓ Place their feet to the foot of the cot, and with head and face uncovered. ✓ Keep cot free of soft objects and pillows, positioners, bumpers and toys. ✓ The safest place for your baby to sleep is in a cot/Moses basket in your room (for at least the first 6 months).
Prevention of injury	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Always use a correctly fitted car seat that is appropriate for your child's weight and length. ✓ Watch your baby at all times, children do not understand danger.
Immunisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Vaccinate your baby, this will protect them from diseases.
Recognition of illness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Seek medical assistance for your baby if you notice the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Raised temperature ◆ Poor feeding ◆ Vomiting ◆ Irritability, lethargy ◆ Decreased urine or stools ✓ Trust your instincts. You know your baby better than anyone and if you feel there is something wrong seek medical advice.