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This closeness of relationship and attention to the baby's needs has been called 'maternal bonding', although we know that fathers and siblings bond with babies too. Psychologists refer to this as 'attachment'. When babies and young children are securely attached to their parents and carers their growth and their development is maximised. Scientists tell us that when babies feel secure and are stimulated by parents, their brains grow faster than babies who do not have this closeness.

Babies quickly demonstrate that they are not the same and have their own personalities, likes and dislikes. Although they cannot speak, they can make their feelings and wishes known through their sounds, gestures and body language. A baby smiling and gurgling, kicking his or her legs in the pram is telling you he or she is happy, ready to play and communicate! A baby who is crying in his cot gives out the message that he wants to be with the adult and not be alone.

Babies and toddlers are learning what 'me' means. They will grow to know that it is themselves they see reflected in a mirror and that their actions will have impacts on or reactions from others, such as toppling a brick tower over or smiling at a friend. Combining this with their mobility and language, they begin to develop an understanding of their own uniqueness.

At home, babies and toddlers begin to get to an idea of who they are and where they fit into the family and their immediate environment.

Anna (nine months) has woken up and is playing with her cot mirror. She looks into it and sees her reflection staring back. She laughs and gets excited. Mum picks her up and holds her up to look in the mirror and plays 'peepo' with her reflection.

Anna is sitting up, making sounds to let her mother know she is there. Her mother imitates the sounds, and Anna repeats them again, chuckling and kicking her legs. She knows that she is making an impact on her mother and enjoys the response and attention she has initiated.

Grandma says Anna likes to sit on the kitchen floor and play with a saucepan and a wooden spoon while she is cooking. Mum says she likes doing this at home. Grandma says that mum did this too when she was a baby. She likes to place objects around the sitting room floor for Anna to find because she did this as well when mum was a baby.