



## How to Be a Responsive Parent and Caregiver

First, the hard part - disconnect from your devices so you can give your baby your full attention. Join the **Hands Free Revolution** started by Rachel Stafford when she realized she was missing her children's lives because she was always connected to a digital device and distracted from the very real and important people right in front of her. She started the blog [www.handsfreemama.com](http://www.handsfreemama.com) and became an overnight role model to thousands of parents out there who realized there is more to life than social media, text messages, and surfing the web. When you visit her blog for inspiration be sure and do it after your child is asleep. Although it may seem like your baby will be the one who benefits most, you won't regret going 'hands-free' either, because you'll find yourself treasuring the deeper relationship you and your baby will develop; you'll have more time to enjoy each day with your child; life will be more meaningful.

Giving your baby undivided attention will help you quickly learn all the ways s/he communicates with you. In infancy these signals will be nonverbal, like fussing, crying, hiccupping, yawning, pointing, looking at things, cooing and smiling. You'll know what each cry and fuss means, and be able to respond in a way that meets your baby's needs. Use a soft, loving tone of voice; smile and coo back and forth with your baby until s/he signals for a break; cuddle, kiss, and hug your baby; play simple games like peek-a-boo and pat-a-cake; sing, dance, and share books together. An important part of being responsive is knowing when your baby has had enough or needs a break - hiccupping, yawning, turning away - these are signals to you to slow down or stop. Wait until baby initiates the interaction again.

As your baby gets older, your play and interactions will be responsive by matching his or her developing needs and abilities. The resources we've listed will give you ideas and pointers about how to match your interactions and relationship to your child's developing personality and needs.

Responsive parenting and caregiving will encourage your child in all areas of development and will carry your child throughout life, help him or her make friends, learn to love, and succeed in school.