

Creating Joyful Care Routines in Your Baby Room

About the AUTHOR

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learning specifically tailored to the baby room. Mona is currently leading a large national project, funded by the Nuffield Foundation, on achieving high-quality provision in the baby room. Check it out at www.thebabyroom.blog.



Care is a huge part of what goes on in the baby room. Babies need nappy changes, bottles and naptimes, and these routines take up a significant part of the day in the baby room. This is why it is essential that we have a rich view of what the care entails, and see it as far more than just meeting a set of bodily needs. Instead, care can be seen as basis for joy, connection and learning with babies (Shin, 2015).



Two ways to think about care

We need to move from thinking about care as a package, delivered from us to babies, to thinking instead about care as a reciprocal dance that plays out dynamically between ourselves and babies.

When we think about care as a package, we tend to think about when and where we should deliver the care and the right way to deliver it. We think about 'good care' as care that is most efficient.

However, there is a lot more to a care routine than just how efficiently it happens. When we think about care as a reciprocal dance, we ask ourselves the questions:

- ★ How are we connecting through this moment of care?
- ★ What is the baby learning in this moment?
- ★ What am I discovering about this baby and about the world in this moment together?



Creating joyful care routines

To bring more joy into care routines, we need to:

1. Slow down
2. Connect
3. Notice the learning

Imagine you are with a 10-month-old baby called Sara who is mucky after a fun and messy lunchtime. The next routine on the agenda is naptime. Before naptime though, you will need to wipe their face and hands and get them changed.

1. Slow down

It is common to feel rushed in this scenario, but bringing more joy to care requires that we slow down and resist the rush. Ask yourself in this moment whether you can afford to slow down. Is cleaning up as urgent as it feels? Is the baby overtired? Or is there an opportunity here for more playfulness and engagement?



2. Connect

If there is a chance to slow down for a few minutes, then the next step is to prioritise connection. Connecting is about tuning into what is happening in this particular moment, between you and this particular baby.

I might be about to pluck Sara out of the high chair but before I do this, I remind myself that this is an opportunity to connect. When I then pick up Sara, I'm now looking for connection. I might enjoy a few seconds of her resting their tired head on my chest or shoulder; I might start to gently talk about what we need to do before they get ready for a nap; I might ask them a question about their lunch or say what I noticed about what they seemed to enjoy. I will slowly move towards the changing area, or I might offer them a wipe or flannel to let them have a go at cleaning their own face, rather than rushing through this sequence.

3. Find the learning

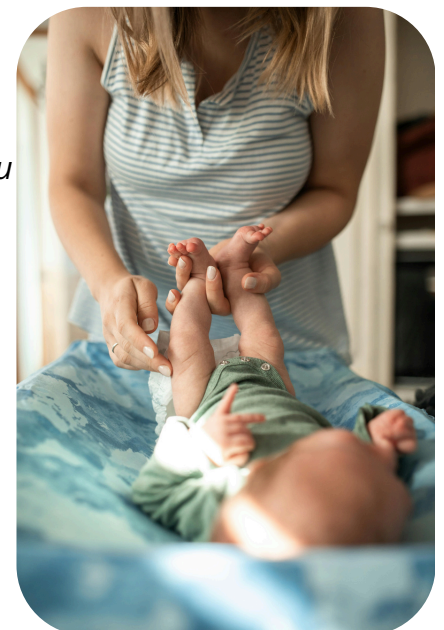
While we are changing the baby, we have an opportunity to notice and revel in the learning. We might find ourselves saying what we notice, such as:

"I can see you arching your back and wow, look at those legs moving. You can hit the floor now with so much force."

"You are showing me that you do not like the feel of this wipe – it's cold isn't it – and you are showing me that through how you move your legs and pull away."

"You're crying now – that's your tired cry. You're rubbing your eyes and tugging on your ear to show me that you're tired."

Each of these comments celebrates learning across physical, social and emotional domains, as the learning actually happens in micro-moments embedded in care routines.



Reflecting with your team

Focusing on connection and learning during care routines can bring a lot more joy into a baby room. Doing it successfully depends on aligning the team culture around this aspiration. As a practical next step, identify a particular care routine that happens in the room that you would like to infuse with more joy through connection and learning.

References:

Shin, M. (2015). Enacting caring pedagogy in the infant classroom. *Early Child Development and Care*, 185(3), 496-508.

Further Reading and Resources

Guard, C. (2024) Thinking about babies: A Froebelian approach. Guidance for Leaders and Managers of Early Years Settings. Available online: [Froebel-Trust-Thinking-about-babies-Interactive.pdf](#)

Sakr, M. (2025) The Baby Room: A practical guide for early years educators. Available online: [The baby room: a practical guide for early years educators](#)

Sakr, M. (2025) Baby, what are you discovering? Available online: [Baby, what are you discovering? – Baby Rooms – Inspiring Leaders](#)

Department for Education: Getting it right from the start. Available online: [How early years practitioners work with babies and toddlers](#)

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