

## Ep #16: Your Baby Doesn't Need Constant Stimulation



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Devon Clement**

## Ep #16: Your Baby Doesn't Need Constant Stimulation

Parents ask me all the time, what should I do with my baby all day? How can I stimulate them? How can I teach them? What do they need to learn? I'm going to get into what a baby's day could and should look like, and it's not what you expect. Stay tuned.

Welcome to *Parenthood Prep*, the only show that helps sleep-deprived parents and overwhelmed parents-to-be successfully navigate those all-important early years with their baby, toddler, and child. If you are ready to provide the best care for your newborn, manage those toddler tantrums, and grow with your child, you're in the right place. Now here's your host, baby and parenting expert, Devon Clement.

Hello, and welcome back to *Parenthood Prep*, the podcast that prepares you for Parenthood. We are in the middle of a ridiculous heat wave here in New York. It is just like a soup, when you step outside, of humidity and heat and stickiness. I am just really loving being inside in the air conditioning, which is great for a podcast recording.

My partner went away this past weekend for a boy's weekend, and he and his friends had so much fun. It was so sweet. He kept telling me stuff about what they were doing, and it was just so lovely to see them having this super wholesome, non-toxic, masculinity weekend. Although they did have several competitions, including a Best Overall. So, I guess some aspects were still a little, typically, traditionally, manly man. But anyway, that was great.

I got lots of time to catch up on stuff around the house and had a day with some friends. We had a lot of fun. So, at least we managed to beat the heat a little bit this weekend. I hope you all are staying cool out there, especially if you're pregnant. Oh my God, I can't even imagine it in this heat. I am so sorry.

My birthday's coming up; I was born at the end of July. My mother still talks about how ridiculous it was being so hot and so pregnant and having to sit with her feet in cold water and basically wearing nothing but a bathrobe or a giant moo-moo all the time because nothing fit. Anyway, she should probably call in with some baby roasts because she has a few, even 43 years later.

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So, speaking of babies, as we always are, something I want to talk about today is: What is a baby's typical day? What does that look like? Parents are always asking me, "What do I do with her all day?" When you're kind of out of that early sort of newborn stage, where what you're doing all day is holding them on the couch and being a zombie while they sleep.

But when they get a little older, three months, four months, six months, a year, what should their day look like? And I think there's this pull to stimulate them constantly, teach them things. "They have to learn. I have to teach them." Especially if you're in a high-achieving culture like New York City or a big city, or you're just around people that feel like they're pressuring you to have your baby have all these accomplishments.

That you have to be constantly doing things with them, so that they can learn, so that they can be ready for school, so that they can do all these things. And that's just not true. A baby's day is really filled with a lot of things that you might not expect. And it's really what's best for them. It's time for them to learn, and it's how they learn.

They do not need to learn the ABCs. We had a client a few years ago, bless their hearts, they were the sweetest parents. But they were keeping notes of what they did all day with their baby, like three - four months. And they would literally write down what songs they sang. "We sang 'Old McDonald'. We sang, 'I've Been Working on the Railroad'. We sang the 'ABCs'."

Her caregivers, she made sure that when you sang the ABCs, you enunciated L-M-N-O-P, so that you would understand that there are different letters and not just that L-M-N-O-P that a lot of kids think that it is because we tend to rush through that part of the alphabet song. And I was like, "Lady, this baby is four months old. Calm down. You are going to completely burn out by the time your baby is one, or maybe not even."

Thankfully, we helped them with sleep training, so they were finally getting some sleep. But there's so much time for that. There's so much time for that. And there are so many things at this age that are more important.

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People ask me too, “What music should I play for my baby?” Sometimes I see moms in groups online, “What TV show should I put on for my baby?” I don't think you should put your baby in front of the TV. I just don't.

I mean, maybe. Yes, if it keeps them calm while you take a shower, and to watch a kid's video or something, great. I am not going to stop you from doing that. But there's really no reason why a baby should be watching a kid's show for endless periods during the day, especially under six months.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no screen time before too. We know that that's unrealistic, especially if you have older kids in the house or whatever. Anyway, this podcast is not about screen time. I'm just saying, you shouldn't be looking for TV shows to show your kid.

If anything, if you're having the TV on, it should be something that you want to watch. Because trust me, when they are older, they are going to let their wants and needs be known and you're going to be watching their stuff. You're going to be listening to their music. So, listen to your music now before they're old enough to tell you what they want. Because trust me, that's going to happen before you know it.

Listen to stuff you like, and let them get a good sense of what cool music is before they start listening to “I've Been Working on the Railroad” all day long. If you must put on something for kids, put on Disney soundtracks, put on Broadway musicals; kids love that stuff.

There are also all these things, all these desires, to stimulate your baby and do what's best for them and really to spend time with them. Because that's what parents want to do, right? You love your baby. When you have time, you want to spend time with your baby. But you don't know what to do because they're not another adult. They're not even a kid that you can talk back and forth to.

So, what do you do with a baby that you want to spend time with? You end up doing things like teaching them the ABCs. There's nothing wrong with it, singing the ABCs if you want to, but don't feel like it's your responsibility to have them learn the alphabet by the time they're nine months old. It doesn't matter.

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And what does matter, what they really need to be learning is what life is like being a person. They've been a person for five minutes, in the grand scheme of things, they need to learn just what it's like to go about a day. They need to learn that people stand up and walk around, so that they can learn that they want to do that also.

I once worked for a mom... And we are absolutely dear, dear best friends to this day, and I still make fun of her for this because it was 15 years ago. I was working with her as her nanny. Well, I was actually her overnight nanny because her twins were not great sleepers. But once in a while I would be with them during the day if her other nanny was not available or whatever.

And one day I was watching them during the day and I asked her, "Can I take them for a walk in the stroller? Something nice to do; get out of your hair a little bit. Give you a break." And she said, "Yes, but not too long because that's too passive." And at this point, again, 15 years ago, I was by no means a newborn care expert or anything, or baby care expert, but I had been taking care of kids for a long time.

And I was like, "Oh, my God, I suddenly understand why your kids don't sleep, why they are always wired, why you are always wired, why the energy level in this house is at like a 13 all the time. It's because you don't let them do anything passive." Babies are supposed to be passive a lot of the time.

Anyway, she has come around. She has learned. She actually now works on our team as one of our sleep coaches. And she tells all of her clients and parents the story of what a wired mom she was, and how wired her babies were as a result, and that they didn't sleep and that they weren't calm. They were so fussy and cranky all the time because they were so overstimulated, because she thought it was the right thing to do.

Another thing is that a baby will start to fuss at this point. I'm not talking about a six-month-old. I'm talking about a little baby, a couple of weeks, two months, three months. The baby will start to fuss and someone will start shaking a toy in the baby's face. Oh, hi, hi baby. And the baby gets distracted by it and they might calm down a little bit.

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But it's not because they were bored. It's not because that's what they needed. It's generally because they are overstimulated and tired, which we talked about in another episode. I talked about the reasons why babies cry and how to get them to stop crying.

You know, most of the time a baby under six months or under four months does not need more stimulation. They get enough. A newborn, those first few weeks, all they need to do is look at your face, when they have their eyes open, for seconds to minutes a day. Newborns should not be wide awake for an hour. Their awake time might be an hour, but that includes feeding. Which, usually they're pretty calm for; may even be sleepy while that's happening.

So really, it always makes me laugh when parents and grandparents are like, "Oh, she is so awake. She's so alert. Oh, hi baby." To me, all I see is a ticking time bomb, that is 15 minutes into 15 minutes of awake time, and is about to start losing their shit if we don't start to calm down and pack them off to sleep. I know it sounds like I'm constantly trying to put babies to sleep, because I am, they need so much more sleep than we let them have, in general.

And if you catch them before they are beyond tired, you can have a much easier time with it. So, we've talked about a lot of things, but I have a list here of what a baby's day should include.

First of all, responsibilities. Babies have responsibilities. They have to get their diaper changed. They have to get their clothes changed. Some days they have to take a bath. They have to eat. These things are important, and these things also usually involve a lot of stimulation.

So, they also need some passivity time, some chill time, some peace. Maybe you put them in a bouncy seat, or put them in a blanket on the floor and just leave them alone. Let them just hang out. See what they want to do when they're a little older and they're learning how to fall asleep on their own.

That time alone in the crib before they fall asleep is huge. They do all their processing. They process everything they learned today, everything they felt. Sometimes I'll sleep train a baby and the parents will tell me, "Oh, it's going so



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great. Except I put her in the crib and she's awake for like 30 minutes before she falls asleep.”

And I say, “Well, is she crying?” “No, she might fuss a little bit, but mostly she's just rolling around and talking. Should I go get her? Is she not tired? Should I put her to bed later?” No, no, you shouldn't. They are really enjoying that “me” time, that alone time where they can process without stuff going on, without people shaking toys in their face.

Now, does it include no play? Of course it includes play. Play can be so basic, so simple. It can be as simple as just looking at you, making eye contact, you making faces with them. Doing that thing everybody does with babies, where you have a fake conversation; which I love to do. They're like, “Oh, blah, blah, blah.” And you're like, “Oh, really? What happened next? No way. You don't say. Then what?” It's just natural. And that's how they learn to have conversations. That's how they learn the back and forth of human interaction.

They should also have some freedom to do what they want. Like I said, put them down on the floor. Take them out of the bouncy chair. If they're only a couple, a few weeks or a few months, you can leave the play gym or whatever. But when they start to be three, four months, we want to work on some physical skills, some rolling, these different things.

I would get rid of all the things that hang over their face, and put things around them so that they have to turn their head, so that they have to turn their body, so that they have to move back and forth.

The play gym is great when they're small, but they call it “baby television” because they just lay there and they look at the things over their face. So, even when you're interacting with them, sometimes you might want to get to the side of them instead of being right on top of them. We want them to learn to move their bodies. We want them to be motivated to turn in one direction and the other. Get that physical exercise in.

Something that unfortunately is a bit of an issue with babies today, is that because of sleep safety, which of course is super critical, they're on their backs

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all the time. It's a lot harder to get some of these physical skills while you're lying on your back all the time. So, we do tummy time so that they can start turning their heads in that direction, so that they can push up.

We're seeing more and more babies needing helmets because they have a flat head, or needing physical therapy because they have torticollis or tension issues because they're not being given the space and time to move around, move on their own. Again, teeny tiny newborns mostly want to be swaddled. They don't need this.

But once we get up to four weeks, six weeks, certainly two months, three months, that's when we really want to start giving them a lot of freedom to move their bodies and encouraging them to move their bodies.

Because another important part of a baby's day is frustration. Frustration is how we learn things. Things did not get invented because people were perfectly happy with the way the world was working. Things get invented because people are frustrated with the options and they want better options.

So, babies learn how to roll from side to side because they get frustrated that there's nothing over their face, and they want to look at the toy that's to their left and to their right. We don't want to just make everything super easy for them all the time.

A lot of times I'm observing parents, again, parents in the mist, and say the baby's four months old and she'll turn her head, and she'll kind of go towards a toy or reach for a toy, and the mom's like, "Oh, here you go," and hands it to her. I'm like, "No, she's got to try. At least let her try a little bit before you just hand it to them."

I know you don't want them fussing, but it really is part of the process. Now, of course, if she's hysterical, I'm not saying stand over her and be like, "Nope, you've got to get it yourself." But let them get a little frustrated. Let them try things. Let them fail. And this is something that will carry through their whole childhood. Let them do things for themselves.



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Let them be bad at it so they can get good at it, and you're not following them around hand feeding them when they're two and a half because they never sat in a high chair because it made them too frustrated. They have to get a little frustrated.

So, what do we have so far? We have responsibilities. We have interaction, play, observation, and passivity. That's their time to watch and observe what's going on. They have their processing time, where they're kind of alone, maybe in the crib. That can also be during the passivity and observation time. We have independent time, where they're moving around, they're getting physical.

Outside time is great, weather permitting. You take a baby outside. You don't have to take them for a walk, especially if you're not in a super walkable area. You can just take them out in a blanket. Just lay on a blanket with them and enjoy the breeze and the sunshine and everything like that.

Babies in other countries and other cultures spend so much time outside. There's that whole thing about babies in Scandinavia. Parents just park the stroller outside, even in the freezing cold winter, and that's where they take their naps and stuff. Of course they're bundled up, they're wrapped up and they're cozy.

But it kind of cracks me up when a parent asks me, "Oh, isn't it too cold to take the baby outside? Too hot to take the baby outside?" Babies are born in every climate and they do fine. You just have to adapt to it. Don't bundle them up if it's hot out, and do bundle them up if it's cold. I mean, I'm not going to say you have to go out if it's ridiculous in either direction, but get your baby outside. Get a little fresh air for both of you.

Get out of the house. Again, even if it's just setting up a big blanket on the lawn and laying out there, or walking a couple blocks to a nearby park and just lying on a blanket at the park. Because if you don't physically feel like taking a super long walk, that's fine.

And if you do feel like taking a super long walk, it is not too passive. It is so good for babies. They're looking around. Maybe they're seeing other people. If you

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live in a city or a busy area, they're looking at the trees. They're looking at the clouds. They're looking at the birds. It is so nice to just take a baby on a walk and see all the things that they're going to see and interact with.

Try to put yourself in their foot... Well, shoes. Put yourself in their bare feet. Put yourself in their grippy socks. As you're walking with your baby, think about it, what is she seeing? Oh, she sees that bird. Oh, what are we hearing? Oh, we're hearing garbage trucks. Oh, we're hearing the neighbors outside their house. We're hearing kids playing in the street. She's learning so much. It is not passive.

And finally, most importantly, the biggest chunk of your baby's day, sleep. They need so much sleep, especially when they've been so busy with all of these other things that they're doing; playing, physically practicing, observing the world, processing everything that they've learned, getting frustrated, processing that frustration, learning new skills, observing.

Babies are so busy, even when it looks like they're doing absolutely nothing. So, have a great time with your baby, and I will talk to you soon.

Alright, listen up, folks. We'd love to joke around but it's time to get real. And that real talk, it's all about giving your babies the roasting they deserve. Yep, you heard it right. We're calling for an epic Baby Roast.

We want you to drop a voice note on our website and call out your little ones for their adorable crimes. Did your baby spit up on your brand-new dress the second you put it on? Maybe they decided to scream through your sister's wedding vows? We want to hear all the juicy details.

Head over to [HappyFamilyAfter.com](http://HappyFamilyAfter.com), or hit the link in the show notes. Every page on the site has a button on the side for you to record straight from your phone. Your story might just make it onto an episode of the *Parenthood Prep* podcast. We can't wait to hear.

Thanks for listening to this week's episode of *Parenthood Prep*. If you want to learn more about the services Devon offers, as well as access her free monthly newborn care webinars, head on over to [www.HappyFamilyAfter.com](http://www.HappyFamilyAfter.com).