

_BEHAVIOR AND LIFE SKILLS _CONNECTIONS

Could Eye Contact With Your Baby Increase Communication Later On?

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You know those endless hours of staring at your baby during those first few months? Well, those moments are more than just a parent in awe of the new life they created.

According to a new study from the University of Cambridge published in the Proceedings of National Academy of Sciences, gazing into our infant's eyes can have a powerful effect on synchronizing our brain activity with theirs. This is in addition to the science that has shown how our emotions and heart-rate sync up as well.

Researchers observed the brainwave patterns of 36 infants using electroencephalography (EEG), which measures patterns of brain electrical activity through electrodes attached to a skull cap.

In the first experiment, the infants watched a video of an adult singing nursery rhymes. First, the adult in the video was looking directly at the infant. Then, she turned her head and stopped looking at the child while still singing. Finally, she turned her head away, but her eyes looked directly back at the infant.

In the second experiment, a real adult sang to the child. This time the adult only looked either directly at the infant or averted her gaze while singing nursery rhymes.

In both cases, the adults' brainwaves were recorded to see if the babies' brainwaves synchronized. Brainwave activity was recorded in advance for the adult on the video and monitored live for the woman in the room with the infant.

Next, researchers compared the infants' brain activity to the brain activity of the singing adult. They found that infants' brainwaves were more synchronized to the adult brainwaves when the adults' gaze met the infants', as compared to when the adults' gaze shifted in another direction. Looking directly at the children provides a stronger signal that the adult intends to communicate with them.

To measure infants' intention to communicate, the scientists looked at how many vocalizations, or sounds, infants made to the adult. When the adults looked directly into the infants' eyes, the children put more effort into communicating. In addition, those infants who made more sounds had higher brainwave synchrony with the adults.

Why does this matter? This synchronizing activity may prepare parents and babies to communicate with each other more effectively, such as understanding when to speak and when to listen.

When parents and children look directly at each other, they are signaling their availability and intention to communicate with one another. Ultimately, this connection could help make learning easier and more effective.

Try some of these tips to increase the time you gaze into your baby's eyes:

- Put away your phone and focus on your baby at various times throughout the day.
- Read stories to your baby.
- Sing songs.
- Recite poetry.
- Talk to your baby about your day or ramble on about any topic, for that matter.
- Make eye contact while feeding your baby a bottle.
- Play a mirror game by looking at each other through your reflections.



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