

## Giving your baby the best possible start

As a new parent you may well be unsure about when you should start taking your baby to classes or to a Baby Development programme. You may even have read articles that suggest that you should avoid over stimulating your baby. This article explores the experiences of a number of parents who have taken their babies to Baby Sensory classes from a very young age.



The Baby Sensory programme, founded by Dr Lin Day (PhD. Dip. Ed. BSc. PGCE. M. Phil) supports the early development of babies through exposure to sensory experiences.

Parents bring their babies to the classes when they are as young as 1 week old and the programme has proved so popular that more than 1 in 75 babies born in the UK now attend a local class.

*“Scientific research increasingly supports the view that rich sensory experiences from birth can build important neural connections that develop future intelligence. One of the most crucial periods for the development of complex neural connections for intelligence is in the first three months of life. This is the time when the brain shows most plasticity.”* **Dr Lin Day.**

Kirsty Davison started attending Baby Sensory classes with Jack when he was just 3 weeks old and only left when he was too old to continue at 13 months. *“Jack never cried at the Baby Sensory classes unless he needed feeding or changing and I was always able to tend to his needs at the sessions. After 3 or 4 weeks he recognised the Say Hello to the Sun song, which is played at the start of every session and he was always settled during the class.”*



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At 20 months, Jack is a very bright Toddler and he is considered to be very advanced for his age. It has been suggested by the nursery that he should be in the over 2's group, where he can join in with more advanced activities. At home, Jack enjoys games involving pictures and he is able to point to the correct picture from a set of over 20 picture cards when prompted by his mum. *“Jack loved the treasure baskets and the other activities at the Baby Sensory classes and I am sure that this has helped him to develop an inquisitive nature. Others often comment that Jack is very advanced and friends are always commenting on how confident he is for his age.”*

The remarkable ability of the brain to make connections and to absorb information has provided Baby Sensory with a wonderful opportunity to encourage the learning and development of babies from birth. Classes give parents the chance to spend quality time with their babies, to interact warmly with them on a one-to-one level and to enjoy a wealth of rich sensory experiences. All activities are accompanied by useful learning and developmental information. This is important because parents need to know why and how they can lead their baby's learning forwards during the most important months of their lives.

*Dr Lin Day explains "From birth, verbal interactions build important brain connections for language and social skills. Sound experiences build the auditory pathways that are fundamental to speech and language development. Movement activities develop brain cells in the visual cortex, which enable the baby to see objects and colours clearly by three months of age."*

Charlie Sawyer discovered her local Baby Sensory classes when baby Mabel was just 3 months old. She signed up for the programme with a group of mum's she had met at her NCT group. In the first few weeks Mabel often slept or needed a feed during the session. *"I was uncertain about whether to continue with the programme or to have a break and start when Mabel was a little older. I decided to stick with it and ended up attending until Mabel was nearly 14 months"*.

*"Parents are often faced with the dilemma of wanting to attend classes, but are unsure if their baby will gain much benefit before the age of three months. However, young babies are especially adaptive to learning. This is because their brains have increased plasticity to events and experiences that facilitate development. Research shows that even if they sleep through part of the session, the benefits will not be eroded."* Dr Lin Day

Mabel is now 18 months old and has developed an exceptional vocabulary, regularly using in excess of 50 words all in the correct context. Her understanding is also very impressive as she understands and follows instructions such as find my slippers. *"Mabel appears to have a broader vocabulary than most of her friends and she is also extremely confident in social situations. She is very happy to talk to adults and loves books. I am sure that the time we spent at Baby Sensory has helped with Mabel's development and I am now really pleased that we didn't miss the early sessions when she was still very young."*

Zofja Ormes first took Pearl along to Baby Sensory Classes when she was just 6 weeks old. *"Pearl was a fretful baby. She loved the Baby Sensory classes from her very first session and after 40 minutes of*

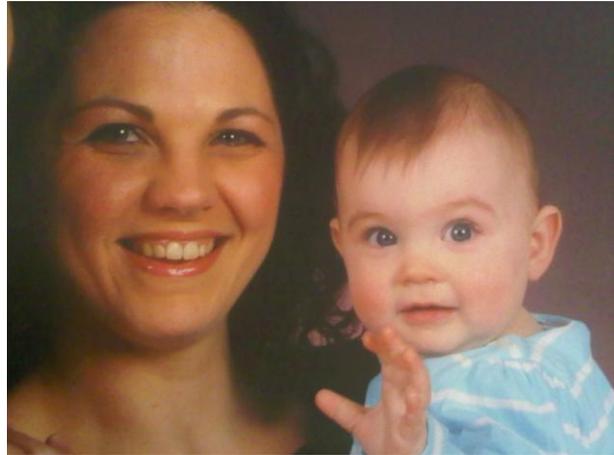


*our first Baby Sensory class she fell asleep in my arms for the very first time. It was a wonderful experience for both of us."* Pearl has advanced quickly; she first crawled at 5 months old, she was waving by seven months and much to the delight of her father, a musician, she loves music and is able to dance in time to the beat at just 12 months. Zofja is convinced that the Baby Sensory sessions have helped significantly with Pearl's development. *"We*

*particularly liked the Baby Sensory classes as each week was different and after every session we looked forward to the next week."*

Parents with premature babies are often even more concerned about taking their babies to classes when their babies are young. Emma Millgate was not deterred when her daughter Khamis was born 5 weeks premature. She first took Khamis to a Baby Sensory class when she was just 4 weeks old, a week before Khamis's expected birth date.

*"From her very first session Khamis enjoyed the Baby Sensory classes. At the end of the class each week, Khamis would often fall into a contented sleep as soon as the "Say Goodbye" song was over."* When Khamis was first born, Emma was a little worried that her development would be delayed as she was premature. This has certainly proved not to be the case. Khamis is in fact very advanced; she was stacking cups at 6 months and at 19 months she has an exceptional vocabulary.



She has recently made play dough ducks with her mum and counted the four ducks they made. *"Khamis has a fantastic vocabulary and I am so proud of her, everyone comments on how clever she is and I am sure that our regular attendance at Jenny Sexton's Baby Sensory sessions have helped her to develop so quickly. I am so pleased that I took her when she was just 4 weeks old."*

Parents who give their babies plenty of physical affection from birth enable them to gain weight faster, develop stronger immune systems, crawl and walk sooner, sleep more soundly and cry less than babies deprived of close physical contact. The Baby Sensory classes provide many ideas for parents to use at home with their babies to support this early development.