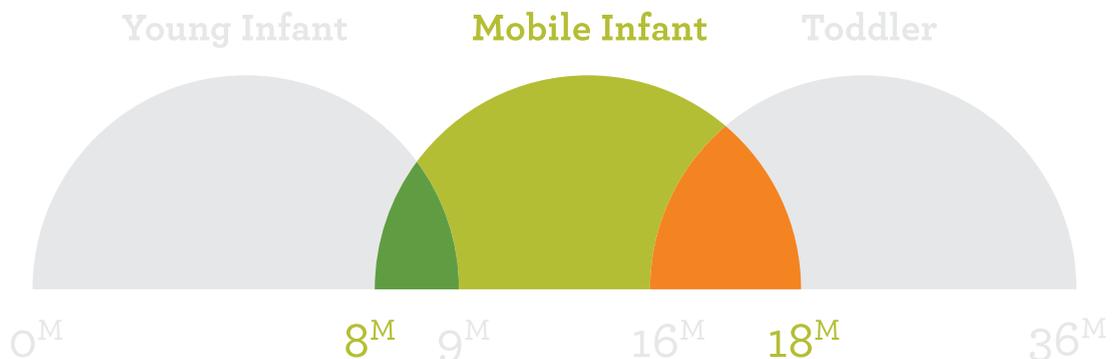


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The Mobile Infant: 8 to 18 Months



The mobile infant, particularly as he gets further past his first birthday, is engaging in play that looks like play to most adults. He enthusiastically puts a toy person in a car or a spoon in a cup (relational play) and builds a tunnel for his car to go through (constructive play).



What's an Infant Like at 8 to 12 Months?

The 8- to 12-month-old infant is interested in everything. He's excited to understand the world and interact with others, although still anxious about strangers and novel situations. He reaches out to touch other infants. He loves to imitate your actions and sounds. He moves from joy at his newfound abilities to fear in novel situations and people to anger when he is prevented from trying new activities.

The young mobile infant can sit steadily, freeing his hands to focus on tasks like banging two objects together. His more accurate grasp allows him to successfully use toys to explore cause and effect—for example, by placing a ring on a stick, banging on drums, or smearing paint.

He may roll, crawl, scoot, pull up to stand, coast along shelving units or railings by walking in a sideways manner or gripping the rail, or take his first steps. This new mobility creates exciting opportunities for exploration and learning, as he can now move away from the treasure baskets or objects placed beside him and seek out interesting activity areas on his own. He may even reach materials on higher shelves. (Be sure the room is childproofed!)

Although he may prefer certain toys, this infant also is busy examining more intentionally how novel items work and what they do, like dumping and filling containers, pulling on strings, and pushing buttons. Repeating these actions over and over again deepens his understanding and gets him ready to learn more complex skills. You'll observe him solving problems by moving around obstacles in the classroom to reach a toy he wants or using tools like a shovel to fill a bucket.

He is learning to cope with delayed gratification—for example, having to wait to play until after his diaper is changed. He babbles with sounds in his home language that sound more and more like words, such as "Dada" or "Tatay" or "ba(l)." He looks to you and the way you respond to him to learn that he is someone who can make change in his world (Mahler, Pine, & Bergman 1975) and to find validation of his emerging skills.

What's an Infant Like at 12 to 18 Months?

As the mobile infant gains more skills, his play becomes more complex because he can grasp a crayon or a paintbrush to make marks and carry items over to fill a cart. He may sit on a scooter and move it backward or forward.

This child may enjoy simple puzzles, such as placing round bead-like puzzle pieces on rods and placing small boxes in large boxes. He likes to push buttons on pop-up toys to see what happens. While his play is basic—he tries things you know won't work, like trying to fit a big box into a small box—these problem-solving experiments are exciting because they are different and more complex than his earlier play in which he explored things mainly by banging, mouthing, and shaking them.

While this infant often plays with objects by himself, he also seeks out social games and interactions that involve repetition, such as peekaboo, so big, and where's the baby? He continues to be interested in children he's familiar with.

He communicates clearly, with gestures, facial expressions, and some first words in his home language (*ani/no, más/more, all done*). He enjoys back-and-forth communication with you and is likely to point out something to share it with you. For example, he might bring you a fish puppet, call it by name or use a gesture for "fish," and then hum the tune to the song "Octopus," by Charlotte Diamond, inviting a playful interaction.

This infant enjoys looking through books and may label the images he sees, though he may not want to sit through the entire book.

You will see an increase in both humorous interactions with grown-ups and peers (such as putting silly things on his head or climbing into tiny containers) and challenging behaviors when he is denied something or during transitions. This infant may take toys from other children, then show surprise when they protest!

You will see the older mobile infant using more overt problem solving in play—an exciting development. He is likely to see a puzzle or a bucket with a shovel as an invitation to action, and you will see him use these items in more expected ways.

He may also become frustrated when objects don't behave as he thinks they should, or when he does not have the motor skills to control the outcome. For example, he may be able to fit only the round puzzle piece in the hole and may bang on the triangular hole. He may not focus on one thing for long and is likely to leave you with a toy or activity, explore something else he likes, and then wander back to check in with you.