

# Health Visiting: Promoting Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health in Everyday Practice

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# iHV introduction

## Our Mission

The iHV is an independent charity, professional body and centre of excellence – established to strengthen the quality and consistency of health visiting, so that health visitors can effectively respond to the health needs of all babies, children, families and communities enabling them to achieve their optimum level of health, thereby reducing health inequalities.

We are a UK-wide organisation with growing international connections:



Influence policy to improve health, end inequalities and strengthen health visiting



Support innovation, research and quality improvement in health visiting



Build professional skills and knowledge to enhance health visiting workforce capability and leadership development



Grow, sustain and support our membership and meet their needs.

## Our Approach:



1. Understanding

2. Collaborating

3. Providing solutions

4. Energising

# What does a Health Visitor do?



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- Health visitors are trained Specialist Community Public Health Nurses with a background as registered nurses or midwives
- Trained in community public health nursing, equipped to work with families with children aged 0–5 years – with the intensity of support based on proportionate universalism:
  - Universal reach/ mandated contacts – see all families enhancing health, child development, and reducing health inequalities
  - Extra targeted and specialist levels of support
- Support whole family mental health – parents (mothers/ fathers/ co-parents), babies and young children
- Support transition to parenthood and the developing parent-infant dyadic relationship (the 1st year of life is a high-risk period for MH)
- HVs and Specialist PIMH HVs are trained to identify need and deliver Emotional Wellbeing support and various targeted interventions (VIG, Circle of Security Parenting, NBO, ADBB)
- Connecting families to wider system support (community and specialist services)
- **Building trusted relationships**

# What we know....

Both practitioners and parents care deeply about baby brain development



**Health  
Visiting**




**Little Sparks  
Big Starts**

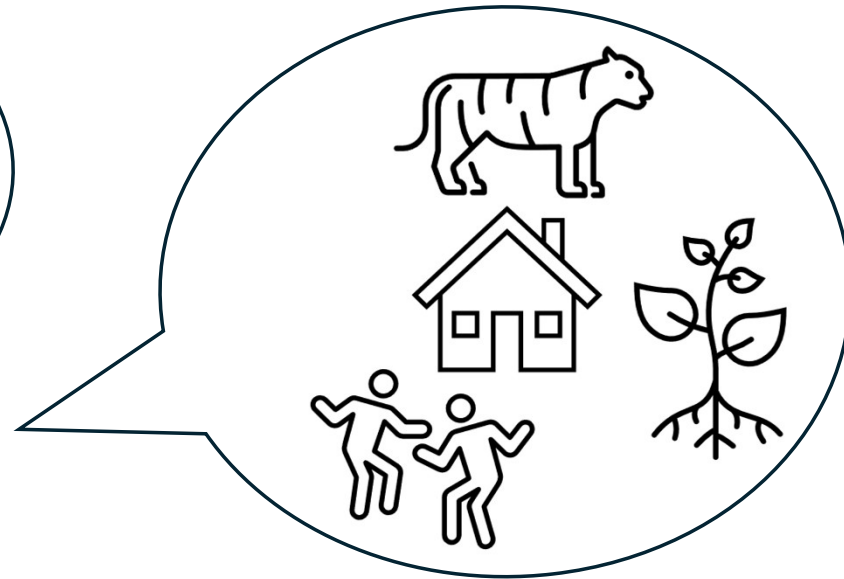


# Framing early baby brain development

Health visiting practitioners share key messages in a wide variety of ways



bonding  
serve and return  
reflective functioning  
wiring    synapses    attachment  
baby cues    responsive parenting  
reciprocity  
attunement



# Weaving the threads



**There's no such thing as perfect parenting.**

**What matters most is offering care, connection and support consistently enough that babies learn to feel safe and loved.**



## 💡 **Repairing the cracks**

Damage from toxic stress can often be repaired if supportive interventions happen early. Trauma can't be erased, but the brain can adapt - building strong new pathways and reinforcement around the affected areas.

# Small everyday interactions matter

## Top tip to share with parents

### Be curious about your baby

Take five minutes to simply watch your baby. Imagine what they might be thinking and feeling.



"What if I don't bond straight away?"

You're not alone! Bonding with a baby takes time, it's not always love at first sight.

Developing a relationship can be a gradual process that starts during pregnancy and deepens as you get to know your baby, care for and interact with them.



# Seizing the opportunities....



Your baby's brain



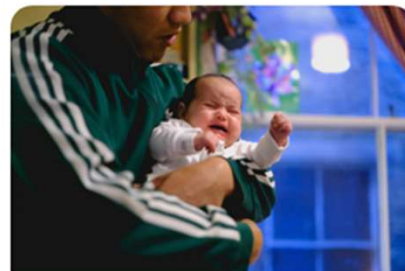
Your baby's communication



Your baby's feeding



Your baby's sleep



Your baby's crying



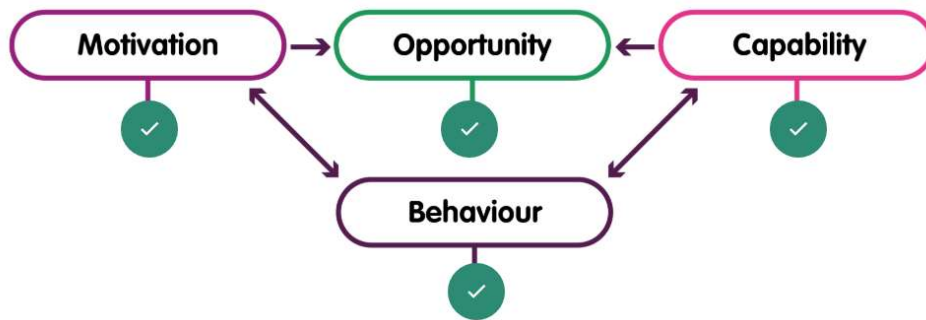
Your baby's play



# Underpinning models

## 1. The COM-B model

Select the hotspots to find out more about the COM-B model:



## 2. The Family Partnership Model (FPM)

Select the button to work through the slider to explore how the FPM can support successful conversations with parents:

**Combined knowledge**

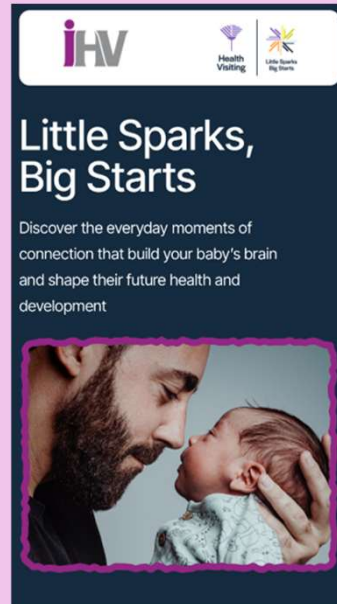
Combining ideas, knowledge and opinions of parents and practitioners generates a shared picture and realistic ideas of how baby brain development can be nurtured and supported.

The screenshot shows a digital interface with a purple background. On the left, a circular window displays a green cooking pot with a green handle. A pink arrow points left from the pot. Below the window are three small circles: a green one with a checkmark, a green one with a checkmark, and a red one with an 'X'. To the right of the window, the text 'Combined knowledge' is displayed in white, followed by a paragraph explaining the concept.



*"Strong seams are made  
from threads that hold  
together."*

# Access Little Sparks, Big Starts – Health Visiting



<https://ihv.org.uk/training-and-events/training-programme/little-sparks-big-starts/>