



It's Not Just Peek-a-Boo

During the first few months of a newborn's life, her entire world as she knows it is limited to what is directly before her eyes. As soon as something is out of her sight, it's as if it was never there. If she is gazing at a rattle and we take it away, the rattle no longer exists in her mind. Gradually her world opens up and reveals to her what else the world has to offer. In time she can begin to think of and imagine people and objects that she no longer sees in front of her. When a seemingly happy baby cries as a favorite caregiver leaves the room and desperately looks for them in the last place she saw them, she is "holding them" in her mind and missing the safety she feels when they are around. This is a significant developmental milestone. This is Object Permanence—the ability to understand that people and objects still exist even after they are no longer in sight.

There are 6 stages of Object Permanence that parents and caregivers can observe in infants.

Stages 1 & 2 (birth–4 mo.) Babies visually track objects and reach for objects if they are close enough.

Stage 3 (4–8 mo.) Babies search for a partly hidden object.

Stage 4 (8–12 mo.) Babies search in last place seen for completely hidden object.

Stage 5 (12–18 mo.) Babies search where object was last seen. (as seen in photo)

Stage 6 (18–24 mo.) Baby has a mature understanding of Object Permanence

The best way caregivers can help babies develop this ability is to give infants a secure and dependable environment to learn in. During the time when object permanence develops, babies love to play:

- Peek-A-Boo
- With mirror toys
- Hide a toy under a blanket
- Drop one toy inside another
- Pop-up toys

