

A Buyer's Guide to Human Potential: The Three Foundational Tools for a Newborn's First Year

Part 1: Introduction: The Architecture of Potential

The period from birth to age three represents the most profound and consequential phase of human brain development. During these initial years, the brain constructs its foundational wiring system at a pace that is never repeated, forming as many as one million new neural connections every second.¹ This intense period of growth is a singular opportunity to establish the architecture for a lifetime of learning, emotional regulation, and well-being.² The experiences and relationships of this sensitive period do not merely entertain or occupy an infant; they physically sculpt the brain, strengthening essential pathways through consistent, positive stimulation while pruning away those that are unused.¹ An infant's potential is, in this sense, unlimited, but the window to provide the strongest foundation is finite.¹

This guide is predicated on a simple yet powerful thesis: the greatest leverage in nurturing this potential comes not from attempting to actively "teach" a newborn, but from meticulously preparing an environment that honors and facilitates their innate developmental trajectory. The most effective tools are not those that dictate or entertain, but those that act as catalysts for the infant's self-initiated exploration and discovery. This philosophy is deeply rooted in the pioneering observational work of two visionary physicians, Dr. Emmi Pikler and Dr. Maria Montessori, whose pedagogical principles have been increasingly validated by modern neuroscience.

Dr. Pikler's work is founded on a profound respect for the infant as a competent and active participant in their own development.⁴ Her great discovery was the principle of "Freedom of Movement," an understanding that infants are genetically programmed to achieve all major motor milestones—from lifting their head to walking—without adult interference or "help".⁴ This unhindered movement is not merely about physical prowess; it is the primary mechanism through which a child develops competence, self-assurance, body awareness, and mental resilience.⁴ Similarly, Dr. Montessori identified the infant's "absorbent mind," a state of intense,

unconscious learning from the environment.⁸ She argued for a "prepared environment" that is simple, beautiful, and ordered, containing specific materials that invite activity and allow the child to develop deep, sustained concentration.¹⁰

The convergence of these philosophies with contemporary neuroscience is striking. The freedom of movement championed by Pikler is now understood to be critical for stimulating the vestibular and proprioceptive systems, the internal senses that govern balance, motion, and body awareness—foundations for all coordinated action.¹² The self-initiated activity advocated by both Pikler and Montessori is known to strengthen the neural pathways associated with executive function, problem-solving, and intrinsic motivation.² The respect and trust at the core of these approaches are not simply ethical positions; they represent a neurologically optimal strategy for development.

Therefore, this guide defines "developmental leverage" as the capacity of a tool to catalyze multiple streams of development—motor, sensory, cognitive, and emotional—simultaneously and harmoniously. The three tools selected are not independent products but interdependent components of a single, overarching system: the prepared environment. They form a cohesive ecosystem designed to support the infant through the critical first year, empowering them to build the foundations of their own potential. The role of the caregiver is elevated from that of a consumer to that of a thoughtful architect, curating a world that meets the profound developmental needs of the newborn.

Part 2: Tool 1: The Foundational Ecosystem for Movement and Sensory Integration

Tool Name

The Lovevery Play Gym

Recommended Configuration

For the newborn period (approximately 0-12 weeks), the optimal configuration involves using

the mat with its five "Developmental Zones" closed to create a simple, defined space. The sustainably sourced wooden arches should be positioned over the mat. The included **Black & White Card Set** should be clipped into the holders in the "Learn to Focus" zone, and the wooden **Batting Ring** should be hung from the central arch.¹⁵ The mat itself, firm yet padded, provides the ideal surface for the infant to lie on their back. This configuration directly aligns with the Piklerian principle of never placing a baby into a position, such as propped sitting or forced "tummy time," that they cannot achieve on their own.⁵ The high-contrast side of the reversible

Play Space Cover can be used to create a more enclosed, visually focused environment if desired.¹⁵

Price in EUR

€155.00

Note: This price is based on the official Lovevery EU website.¹⁵ Prices may vary across different retailers and regions. Other sources indicate prices around €173 or conversions from GBP that result in a price of approximately €165.¹⁸

Purchase Channels

- **Direct:** The primary and most reliable channel is the official Lovevery EU website (lovevery.eu).¹⁵
- **Major Online Retailers:** The Play Gym is also available through major platforms such as Amazon within Europe.¹⁹
- **Secondary Markets:** Pre-owned gyms can be found on marketplaces like eBay, though buyers should exercise caution regarding the completeness and condition of all included components.²⁰

Justification: The Nexus of Development

The Lovevery Play Gym is not merely a play mat; it is a meticulously designed developmental

ecosystem that provides exceptional leverage by addressing multiple, interconnected streams of infant development simultaneously. Its design reflects a deep understanding of pediatric research, creating a single, cohesive tool that serves as the foundation for a child's first year of learning.

A Platform for Gross Motor Autonomy

The gym's most fundamental contribution is the provision of a safe, comfortable, and non-restrictive "floor stage".²¹ This directly facilitates the Pikler principle of

Freedom of Movement.⁴ On the flat, firm surface, the infant is free to stretch, kick, and turn their head, building foundational strength in their neck, core, and limbs. As they grow, this unhindered environment allows them to discover, at their own pace, the ability to roll, pivot, and eventually push up, without adult interference.⁵ This process of self-initiated motor development is paramount, fostering not only outstanding physical coordination and balance but also a profound sense of competence and self-assurance as the child learns what their body can do.⁴

Targeted Stimulation for the Developing Visual System

The gym is explicitly engineered to support the precise, sequential development of an infant's visual system. A newborn's vision is blurry, with a focal distance of approximately 20 to 30 cm, and their developing retinal cones make them most responsive to high-contrast black and white imagery.²² The gym's interchangeable card sets, beginning with the

Simple Black & White Card Set, are perfectly calibrated for this initial stage.¹⁵ Placing these cards in the overhead clips provides the exact stimulus needed to encourage visual exploration, strengthen eye muscles, and develop the ability to track objects. This targeted approach respects the neurological reality that the sensory pathways for vision are undergoing a period of peak development in the first year, making appropriate stimulation highly impactful.¹

An Integrated System for Sensory Development

The gym's "5 Developmental Zones" embody the Montessori principle of isolating sensory experiences to allow for deeper, more focused engagement and prevent overstimulation.⁹ Unlike many commercial activity gyms that present a chaotic assault of lights, sounds, and textures, the Lovevery gym offers distinct, purposeful areas. The "Exploring How Things Feel" zone provides varied textures, while the "Making Sounds" zone offers simple, cause-and-effect auditory feedback. This design aligns with neuroscientific findings that infants have a biological need for interesting, age-appropriate stimulation to build and strengthen neural circuitry.² By offering clear, uncluttered sensory information, the gym allows the infant to process experiences more deeply, building a coherent understanding of the world.

Fostering Cognitive Skills and Executive Function

From the earliest weeks, the gym introduces foundational cognitive concepts. The simple act of reaching for and striking the **Batting Ring** teaches a profound lesson in cause and effect: the baby's action creates movement and sound.¹⁵ This is a primary experience of agency, the understanding that one can impact one's environment. As the child develops, the "Hiding and Finding" zone is designed to introduce the concept of object permanence—the understanding that things continue to exist even when they cannot be seen—which is a critical cognitive milestone in the first year.¹⁰

The gym's greatest leverage, however, may lie in a feature that is not part of the physical product itself: the included **Play Guide**.¹⁵ Research consistently affirms that the most powerful engine of brain development is the responsive, nurturing interaction between an infant and their primary caregiver.² The caregiver is the infant's "best toy." Yet, many new parents feel uncertain about how to meaningfully engage with a newborn. The Play Guide addresses this directly, transforming the gym from a passive object into an interactive tool for the parent. It provides a year's worth of stage-based, expert-backed activities and explanations, scaffolding high-quality "serve and return" interactions.³ It educates the parent on their child's development in real-time, empowering them to be a confident, attuned partner in the learning process.

Finally, the Play Gym's design philosophy serves as a crucial antidote to the culture of overstimulation prevalent in the modern toy market. It contains no batteries, flashing lights, or electronic sounds.¹⁵ This aligns with Montessori's advocacy for "passive" toys that require the child to be active, rather than "active" toys that promote passivity.⁹ It also respects neuroscientific warnings about the potential harm of exposing a developing brain, which is wired to learn from the slower pace of the real world, to excessive, rapidly changing, and unrealistic digital stimuli.²⁴ The choice of this gym is therefore a deliberate decision to protect

and nurture the infant's ability to develop deep concentration and attention, skills that are foundational to all future learning.

Part 3: Tool 2: The Catalyst for Visual Concentration and Cognitive Order

Tool Name

The Montessori Munari Mobile

Recommended Configuration

The Munari is the first in the classic series of four Montessori visual mobiles and is specifically designed for the earliest phase of life, from approximately 2 to 8 weeks of age.²⁵ Its placement is critical: it must be hung roughly 30 cm from the infant's face, the optimal focal distance for a newborn.²³ It should be positioned over the infant's "movement area"—such as above The Lovevery Play Gym—and not over their sleep space or changing table. The Munari is a tool for periods of quiet alertness, where the infant can engage in the "work" of observation.²⁷ Its movement should be generated solely by the natural currents of air in the room, creating a slow, gentle, and unpredictable motion.²⁵

Price in EUR

€30.00 - €40.00

Note: The price varies depending on the manufacturer and retailer. Nienhuis Montessori, an official and high-quality supplier, prices the mobile at €36.41.²⁶ Other European boutique retailers offer it for approximately €30.00 to €40.00.²⁵ Handmade versions from artisans are

also widely available.

Purchase Channels

- **Specialized Montessori Suppliers:** Retailers like Nienhuis Montessori (nienhuis.com) and Montessorishop.com are premier sources for authentic, high-quality materials.²⁶
- **Boutique Online Shops:** Many smaller, curated online stores within the EU specialize in Montessori and Waldorf-inspired toys and materials (e.g., Monti's World in the Netherlands).²⁷
- **Artisan Marketplaces:** Etsy is a significant channel for sourcing handmade Munari mobiles, often from sellers based in the EU who adhere to the original design principles.²⁹

Justification: The Work of Seeing

The Munari mobile is a masterpiece of developmental design, appearing deceptively simple yet representing a profound understanding of a newborn's perceptual and cognitive needs. It is not a toy in the conventional sense, but rather the infant's first formal material for focused, developmental "work." Its exceptional leverage lies in its precise calibration to the newborn's nascent abilities, allowing it to build foundational skills of vision and concentration that will underpin all future learning.

Precisely Calibrated for Newborn Vision

The mobile's design is a direct response to the neurobiology of newborn sight. An infant's retinal cones, which detect color, are not yet fully developed, resulting in a world perceived primarily in shades of grey.²² Their visual system is, however, highly attuned to high-contrast edges and bold, simple patterns. The Munari's use of black and white geometric shapes is therefore not an arbitrary aesthetic choice; it provides the exact visual information that a newborn's brain is biologically primed to seek out and process.²⁶ This perfect match between the stimulus and the infant's capacity ensures engagement without causing visual strain or overstimulation.

Developing Foundational Visual Skills

Observing the mobile is an active, not passive, process. As the lightweight elements drift and turn in the air, the infant's eyes are compelled to follow them. This act strengthens the ocular muscles and builds a suite of critical visual skills. These include **binocularity**, the ability to use both eyes together in a coordinated way, and **dynamic visual tracking**, the skill of following a moving object smoothly.²⁵ The mobile's three-dimensional structure, with elements hanging at different depths, also encourages the development of depth perception. These are the fundamental mechanics of sight, and the Munari provides the ideal gymnasium for their development.

Cultivating Sustained Concentration

In a world of overstimulating baby products, the Munari's gentle, quiet nature is its greatest strength. Its movement is slow, non-repetitive, and driven by natural air currents, making it endlessly fascinating but never overwhelming.²⁵ This quality captivates the infant's attention, inviting them to focus for sustained periods. This is the very beginning of the development of concentration, a cornerstone of the Montessori method and a skill essential for all higher-level learning.⁸ The mobile teaches the infant how to engage in deep, quiet observation, a stark contrast to electronic mobiles whose repetitive music and mechanized movements can habituate the brain to passive entertainment.

A First Lesson in Abstract Order

The construction of the Munari mobile is governed by precise mathematical relationships in the size and balance of its components.²⁵ The infant, of course, does not consciously perceive these principles. However, their "absorbent mind" is taking in a visual experience of harmony, proportion, and logical order. The transparent sphere reflects light, adding another layer of visual interest and introducing a lesson in physics. This exposure to an ordered, predictable, yet dynamic system provides an early, unconscious foundation for the patterns of logic and reason that are central to STEM thinking.²⁵

The introduction of the Munari mobile into a newborn's environment is a practical application of the trust that is central to the Pikler and Montessori philosophies. It communicates a profound belief in the infant's innate capacity for focused, independent activity.⁶ Instead of

assuming the newborn must be constantly held or entertained, the caregiver provides a beautiful, developmentally appropriate point of focus and then steps back, allowing the child the space and time to engage with it on their own terms. This practice not only fosters independence from the earliest weeks but also trains the caregiver to become a skilled observer, learning to recognize and respect their child's cues and burgeoning ability to concentrate.⁸

The Munari also serves to redefine the very concept of an "educational toy." Its value lies not in teaching explicit content like letters or numbers, but in building the underlying neurological architecture required to learn anything at all. It prioritizes the development of the *faculty* of vision and the *skill* of concentration over the memorization of symbolic information. It is a powerful lesson for the caregiver that true early education is about strengthening the biological tools of learning, preparing the mind for a lifetime of discovery.

Part 4: Tool 3: The Instruments for Grasping and Sensory Discovery

Tool Name

A Curated Set of Grimm's Wooden Grasping Toys

Recommended Configuration

For an infant beginning to show interest in reaching and grasping (approximately 2-6 months), a foundational set of two to three simple, distinct wooden toys is ideal. This minimalist approach avoids sensory overload and allows the infant to achieve mastery over each object before a new one is introduced. An optimal starting set from Grimm's Spiel und Holz Design would include:

1. **Rainbow Beads Grasper:** A flexible, tactile object composed of wooden beads on a strong elastic cord. Its shape is easy for small, developing hands to clutch and manipulate.³¹
2. **Bead Ring or Rattle Pyramid:** A rigid object, such as a simple ring with colored beads or

a small pyramid with rattling discs. This introduces a different tactile experience and a clear cause-and-effect sound when shaken.³¹

These items are crafted from sustainably sourced wood and finished with non-toxic, plant-based oils and water-based color stains, making them entirely safe for mouthing—a primary and essential method of sensory exploration for infants.³³

Price in EUR

€10.00 - €17.00 per item

Note: Prices are consistent across the official brand website and various European retailers.

- **Rainbow Beads Grasper:** €15.00 - €16.95³¹
- **Rattle Pyramid:** €14.00 - €14.95³¹
- **Bead Ring:** €10.00 - €11.95³¹

Purchase Channels

- **Direct:** The Grimm's EU website (grimms.eu) offers their full range of products.³¹
- **Official European Retailers:** Grimm's has an extensive network of official retailers across Europe, available through both online stores and physical shops. Examples include BeoVERDE (Ireland), maman et bebe (Germany), and Conscious Craft (UK).³²

Justification: The Hands as Tools of the Mind

If the Play Gym is the environment and the Mobile is the catalyst for focus, then simple grasping toys are the first tools the infant uses to act upon that environment. These objects are instruments for learning about the physical world and, just as importantly, about the infant's own body. Their exceptional leverage comes from their simplicity, their natural materiality, and their capacity to empower the infant as an active, self-directed learner.

Developing Fine Motor Control and Grasp

A newborn's grasp begins as an involuntary reflex. The introduction of an object like a Grimm's Beads Grasper encourages the crucial transition to a purposeful, voluntary grasp. The varied shapes and textures of these toys invite exploration and manipulation, which strengthens the intricate muscles of the hands and fingers while developing hand-eye coordination.¹⁰ This process—seeing an object, intending to grasp it, and coordinating the muscles to do so—is a complex neurological feat and a critical step in learning to interact with the world intentionally.

Providing Rich, Reality-Based Sensory Feedback

In alignment with Montessori principles, these toys are made from natural materials that provide authentic sensory information.⁹ Wood is a uniquely rich medium for a developing brain. It has weight, which provides proprioceptive feedback. It has a subtle, variable texture and grain. Its temperature changes in response to the warmth of a hand. It makes a gentle, resonant sound when tapped. This complex, reality-based feedback is profoundly different from the uniform, inert, and often artificial sensory experience of plastic.² By interacting with wood, the infant's brain builds a more accurate and nuanced understanding of the physical properties of the world.

Empowering the Infant as an Active Learner

These are quintessential "passive" toys; they do nothing on their own.⁹ All sound, movement, and discovery must be initiated by the infant. When the baby shakes the rattle, it makes a sound. When they turn the grasper, a new color or angle is revealed. This direct, immediate, and understandable feedback loop is a powerful teacher of cause and effect. It reinforces the infant's sense of agency and encourages self-initiated play—the very foundation of intrinsic motivation, curiosity, and independent problem-solving.⁵

The strategic choice of a simple wooden rattle over a complex, feature-laden electronic toy is a decision rooted in developmental science. The infant brain, which is working to build its foundational networks, can be easily overwhelmed by multi-sensory stimuli.² A toy that simultaneously flashes lights, plays music, and speaks can be confusing, leading to shallow engagement or sensory shutdown. A simple wooden rattle, by contrast, isolates the experience. The infant's motor action (shaking) produces a single, clear auditory result. This

allows the brain to form a direct, unambiguous neural connection between action and consequence. This "less is more" approach is not about deprivation; it is about providing the clarity necessary for the brain to build strong, specific neural pathways, which is a more efficient and effective mode of learning.

Furthermore, these toys are critical tools for building an infant's "body schema." The internal senses of proprioception (knowing where one's body is in space) and interoception are fundamental to a coherent sense of self.¹² When an infant successfully grasps a wooden toy and brings it to their mouth, their brain receives a rich stream of integrated data: the tactile sensation of the wood on their gums and tongue, the proprioceptive information about the position of their arm and hand, and the motor plan required to execute the movement. This multi-sensory feedback loop is essential for mapping the body's boundaries and capabilities, answering the fundamental questions: "What is me?" and "How do I control this body?" They are not merely "hand toys," but full-body learning instruments.

Part 5: Summary Table: The Newborn's Developmental Toolkit

The following table provides a concise summary of the three foundational tools, their recommended configurations for the first three months, price ranges, and their primary developmental leverage. It serves as a quick-reference guide to the core recommendations of this report.

Tool Name	Recommended Configuration (0-3 Months)	Price Range (EUR)	Primary Developmental Leverage
The Lovevery Play Gym	Mat on floor, arches attached, high-contrast cards in focus zone, batting ring hung centrally.	€155 - €175	Gross Motor Freedom & Integrated Sensory Development: Creates a safe "floor stage" for unrestricted movement while providing stage-based,

			non-overwhelming visual, tactile, and auditory stimuli.
The Montessori Munari Mobile	Hung 30cm above the infant's movement area (not sleep area), used from approx. 2-8 weeks.	€30 - €40	Visual Acuity & Sustained Concentration: Provides precisely calibrated high-contrast stimulus to build foundational visual skills and the capacity for deep, uninterrupted focus.
Grimm's Wooden Grasping Toys	A curated set of 2-3 items, such as the Rainbow Beads Grasper and a simple Bead Ring or Rattle.	€10 - €17 per item	Fine Motor Skills & Reality-Based Learning: Facilitates the development of purposeful grasp while providing authentic sensory feedback (texture, weight, sound) that teaches cause and effect.

Part 6: Conclusion: The Prepared Environment as the Ultimate Tool

The three tools detailed in this guide—The Lovevery Play Gym, the Montessori Munari Mobile, and the Grimm's Wooden Grasping Toys—are not an arbitrary collection of "best-in-class" products. They represent a carefully selected, interlocking system designed to create a complete, cohesive, and developmentally optimal "prepared environment" for a newborn.⁹ The

Gym establishes the foundational space for movement and exploration. The Mobile provides the first object of intense focus within that space. The Grasping Toys become the first instruments for manipulation and discovery within that same space. Together, they form an ecosystem that respects and responds to the infant's innate developmental drives.

The implementation of this system redefines the role of the caregiver. It shifts the focus away from a paradigm of teaching and entertaining towards one of thoughtful observation and environmental architecture.⁸ The primary task is to trust in the infant's genetically encoded developmental timeline and their powerful "absorbent mind," providing the precise conditions under which their potential can unfold naturally and at its own pace.⁶ This approach requires patience, restraint, and a deep respect for the child's autonomy.

The initial investment in this philosophy—a commitment to simplicity, respect for the child's capabilities, and trust in the natural process of development—yields returns that extend far beyond the first year. The foundational capacities cultivated in this carefully prepared environment are the very definition of human potential. The physical confidence and body awareness gained through free movement; the ability for deep, sustained concentration honed through quiet observation; the intrinsic motivation and sense of agency learned through self-initiated play; and the secure attachment built upon a relationship of trust and respect—these are the bedrock skills for a lifetime of learning, emotional well-being, and successful adaptation to a complex world.¹ This is not merely a strategy for buying toys; it is a framework for building a human being.

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