

WELCOME BABY Newsletter for 21 Months

Dear Parents,

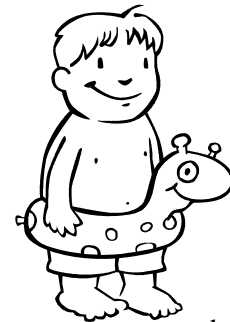
Your toddler is moving along, 21 months old already! Your child has new skills, his balance is better, his vocabulary is growing. He is proud of his accomplishments and may even be trying to cooperate a bit with your requests. You have learned a lot about one another. For both parent and toddler, this is a time of growing self-esteem. What does this really mean? For even while feeling “good” about oneself, it doesn’t take much for a parent or toddler - or both at once - to feel exhausted, stressed or over stimulated. Taking care of a toddler is big responsibility, taking care of oneself as a parent is equally important.

“Children are people with needs as real as, if different from, our own, and with an equal right, as citizens like us, to have them met. Parents are people too with special needs, for the moment, because their children need them and they need to meet their children’s needs.”

Penelope Leach, author Children First, (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1992).

In a family, how do we deal with self-esteem issues, and is it enough to just “feel good about ourselves”? Is there a good working definition of self-esteem? And how would it relate to raising and caring for a 21 month old toddler? One definition of self-esteem came out of some long-term work years ago in California:

Self-esteem is feeling good about oneself; having the character to be accountable for one’s own actions; and treating others with dignity, kindness and respect.



SELF ESTEEM

Every time you say warm, gentle, encouraging words to your child, you are helping build her self-esteem and confidence. Phrases like “Good job!” let her know she is loved and that you care about her and her feelings. We all like to hear comforting words; sometimes though, they are hard to say - after a temper outburst, we’d rather grit our teeth or slam a door. Some of us may not have received many comforting words as children and saying them out loud now may be difficult. To help us, we try to remember that what we model is what we get. If our own parenting models were less than what we might have wished for, how do we find new ones? How do we learn to build confidence and self-worth in our children?

We practice. We ask questions. We seek support and ideas. We learn about the stages and tasks of early child development. It might sound awkward, but we “read” our children. Welcome Baby encourages reading books to babies, but learning to “*read your baby*” is just as important.

Reading your baby means learning about what tasks he is working on. It might be motor tasks like walking, or trying to fit a piece into a wooden puzzle (hand-eye coordination). It might be an emotional task like autonomy, (*I want to do it myself*), or control, (*Who is in charge?*). Being kind and respectful to your busy toddler helps everyone’s self-esteem. Warm, gentle words are an excellent start. Helping your child learn to be accountable for his own actions is a much longer and more challenging process. This then becomes the discipline of good parenting. Building self-esteem is where discipline becomes a two way street. A big part of this happens during the toilet training time that over the next year or so will become a large focus of your relationship with your toddler.



TOILET TRAINING

You might be thinking this is too early to start toilet training. It is. A 21 month old toddler isn't ready yet. Most children do not develop bladder and bowel control until two and a half. For some, it is even later than three. We are just talking about it now because it is important to plan and when we know ahead of time what we might expect, we can be better prepared and more relaxed. Over the next few years, bathroom issues are going to be a big deal. Learning to understand what is going on from your toddler's perspective is important.

Just as helping your child get in the car seat properly or encouraging her to sit at the table while eating her yogurt – instead of walking all over the room with the cup upside down – bathroom and toilet issues are a discipline. They become a shared discipline – and teaching – for both toddler and parent. Grownups have rights to privacy and so do children.

How can this be when it seems like all you want is to be left alone in the bathroom? But you can't leave your toddler alone to wander. And while you're in the bathroom, your toddler is curious about what you are doing while alternately unrolling the toilet paper into a blizzard of white paper on the floor.

People frequently ask about which is the correct way to position the toilet paper roll. You'll discover this soon enough. One way can undo the entire roll in seconds. Put the other way around, the roll can only spin.

Important Facts for Parents, Meredith Baker

So whose job is it to toilet train your child? Who is in charge? This toddler age can be a time of great conflict about "who is the boss?" and it seems unfortunate that this is also such a big bathroom time. It might seem discouraging now and you might be tired of changing diapers, but children do manage to figure it out. It is an important job for them to learn, and it is important that it **is** the child's accomplishment.

JUST WONDERING: WHEN TO START TOILET TRAINING?

Dr. T. Berry Brazelton in his book, Touchpoints, (Perseus Books, 1992), tells us that **it is the child's job and that he or she needs to be ready**. There are all sorts of ways that let you know a child is getting ready. One is language - your toddler can begin to understand words and concepts like, "This is mine and this is yours." Another is that some of the negativism is beginning to taper off. Children around age two are more cooperative and can listen better (this is something to look forward to!). Also, as children get closer to two, they like to imitate you, to "do what daddy does," to "wear mama's clothes." This is great fun, it is part of wanting to be just like you. And, you might find this hard to believe: children begin to have a sense of tidiness.

These are clues: language, less negativism, imitation and tidiness (putting things where they belong).

WHAT ARE THE MAGIC STEPS? (remember, nothing is magic, it is trial and error)

1. Get a potty and put it on the floor. Let your toddler take it around and get used to it.
2. After a week or two, take him to sit on his potty – in his clothes, while you sit on yours. In order to get him used to sitting there, you can either read, chat or offer him a cookie.
3. After another week or so, ask him if you can take off his diaper so he can sit on his potty. You sit on yours. You can say, "This is what Mommy does every day. This is what Daddy does. We go to the potty when we are big like you."
4. The third week, when he has a dirty diaper, take him to his potty to undo it; then put it in the potty. You can say something like, "Someday this is where you will go to do your b.m. This is what Mommy and Daddy do every day. This is your potty, this is mine." It's a good idea to wait until he loses interest before you flush it away. Some children worry about what happens to it, after all, it is a part of him.



5. The next step is really up to your toddler. If he or she resists, forget it for a while. If he is still interested you can offer to take off his clothes and let him run around for a while with a bare bottom. You can offer to put his potty near where he is playing; he can go by himself when he wants to. If he does produce something, leave it there for him to admire. Don't overdo your congratulations. Remember, this is his achievement; this is something for him to be excited about.
6. If he is really ready, you can leave his pants off for longer periods of time. If he has an accident or begins to resist, simply go back to diapers. Try not to make a big fuss or let it seem like punishment. Try to say very little about it; when he is ready, let him try again. You are counting on his desire to imitate the important "big" people in his life.
7. When learning to urinate in the toilet, a boy should begin sitting down. It's too much fun to stand up and spray. When he's trained, Dad or an older male can show him how to stand up to urinate.
8. Night training shouldn't begin until he's dry after his nap and he lets you know he wants to be dry at night.

These are the suggestions from Dr. T. Berry Brazelton's book, Touchpoints. This might be a good time to check it out of the library. You can also find a number of other books about toilet training that you can read with your toddler. When your child is ready, she'll let you know. Some children show a lot of interest at first and then for some reason, completely resist anything to do with the potty for a period of time. If this happens, then it's best for you to forget it for a while, too.

Getting toilet trained is the child's job and she needs to be ready, not only to cooperate, but also to manage the control of her own body. Being dry at night can take some children a long time; sometimes children aren't ready until three, four or even five. It can be a long process, and it can be difficult when grandparents or others put pressure on us to train our child too soon. The same pressure and conflict that we feel from others is often what our child feels.

In this business toilet training, our job as parents is to know when to encourage, when to suggest, when to let go. It is the same work we do in helping our toddler build her self-esteem. Self-confidence doesn't come from someone else saying again and again, "You are such a good girl." It comes from a deeper place within an individual.



Self-esteem comes when children learn to be

satisfied, competent and accountable for

their own actions. Parenting a toddler is delightful, challenging, and at times overwhelming. Over time, parents become amazingly resilient and competent. When we take care of ourselves and listen to the words we speak, we can apologize if we need to and start over again when we realize we've made a mistake. Respecting the "work" of toddlers means we treat our children with kindness just as we treat ourselves with kindness. Treating one another with kindness sets a good model for our children and helps keep us in balance while we are learning new skills.

Best wishes from WELCOME BABY! Please watch for another newsletter when your child is 24 months old.

MUSICAL DISCOVERY TODDLER groups are available in Mount Vernon, Anacortes and Sedro-Woolley. Please call for a schedule. 360-419-3324.

WELCOME BABY! "warm-line" 360-419-3324

WELCOME BABY! is a parent support and education program available to families of **all** children, birth to age, three in Skagit County. WELCOME BABY! is sponsored by Skagit County Public Health, Skagit Valley Hospital, Island Hospital, Kiwanis, Rotary, Friends of Welcome Baby & Baby Talk and United Way of Skagit County.

Best wishes from Friends of Welcome Baby, watch for another newsletter when your baby is 24 months old.