

# WELCOME BABY Newsletter for 5 Months

## Dear Parents,

Your new baby is 5 months old. For most babies this is a wonderfully happy time. A mother asked me recently if maybe she should be doing more with her baby to encourage his brain development. She said she felt guilty when she went to take a shower and her baby was playing happily and safely on his blanket or in his crib. This set me to thinking. Do other parents feel this way?

We hear a lot about how much a baby is learning in the first two years of life and sometimes it's easy to feel that we, as parents, are not doing enough. Remember, there is a difference between learning and teaching. I like to call this five-month time the "*Honor the Learning*" month for your baby.

Because we are told that a baby's brain is growing at such a rapid rate, does this mean that we are supposed to be teaching him more and more? Does this mean that if we aren't playing with our baby every available minute that we aren't doing our job as parents? Goodness, no! Is it a good idea to park the baby in front of the television or an "educational video" when we need to do something like cook dinner? Heavens, no!

Your baby is still *only* 5 months old, less than one half of a year, the first in baby's long life. His neurological system, digestive system, and sleep-wake patterns are still getting organized. If by chance he was particularly fussy in his first weeks and months, things may just now be settling down and you find yourself enjoying your baby more every day. Please don't feel like you need to "make up for lost time." Everything your baby does at his own pace is a learning experience, and the pleasure for him is your smile and encouragement.



Some five-month-old babies like to lie on their backs and kick and kick and kick their legs. This is great fun – and great learning. Some babies can move all the way around in a circle. Some will kick for 10 or 15 minutes, all the while getting a lot of exercise. (You try it). When she needs your attention, your baby will squeak or squeal or screech. Then you smile at her and say something like, "Wow, good kicking". Baby is busy learning what her legs can do.

## HONORING YOUR BABY'S LEARNING

The important thing to remember is that your baby's neurological system is still developing. **You will want to make sure your baby's head and neck are well supported;** even though your baby might be strong, he will tire easily. You might want him to sit up, but usually babies this age fall over easily and can bonk their heads. When your baby is ready to sit on his own in the next two to three months, he'll be stronger and much more steady. Right now, make sure he has good support for his back and neck. When he rolls around on the rug struggling to reach a toy, he works hard at getting strong and he is figuring out for himself what he can do.

Your baby is working on her **vision**. She is learning to focus more clearly and track with her eyes. She is learning to concentrate and pay attention. When she stares at the cat crossing the room or at the shadow of a leaf moving on the wall, she is doing her work. Babies this age like to look and stare at things. This is part of their play. **Respecting the development of your baby's vision and concentration is as important as supporting her head and neck when you carry and play with her.** This is one reason that television and videos are not good for babies, they interfere with the baby's ability to concentrate and focus. Imagine if you were interrupted all the time when you were trying to concentrate, you might feel distracted and fussy.

Your baby is working on his **hearing**. When he reaches for a rattle and is able to grasp it in his chubby hands, this is a big accomplishment. Listening to the noise of the rattle as his hand shakes it back and forth is very exciting for your baby. He sees what his hand can do and he hears the sound of the rattle at the same time. He hears your voice say, "Good job," and he sees you smile.



**Your baby is learning how his body works**, what feels good to him, what it takes to roll over and stretch. Some babies like to be on their tummies, some fuss; but tummy-time is great exercise. Gradually, babies get used to being on their tummies and can push up and reach for toys. They kick their legs out behind them and stretch far to the front like a little turtle trying to get out of its shell.

*“We help our children by respecting their rates of development. It is our job to see, appreciate, and offer chances for development, not to push. This might mean we give our babies time and space on the floor so they can learn to crawl when they are ready. It doesn’t mean we give them crawling lessons!”*

**Parenting Young Children**, Dinkmeyer, McKay and Dinkmeyer  
American Guidance Service, Minnesota, 1989

## CREATIVITY BEGINS

Parenting a child who can enjoy solitary play is a lot more relaxing than trying to parent a child who needs constant attention and entertainment. We might be tempted to think that our baby will be smarter if he’s watching an educational video and might be bored rolling around on his blanket playing with toys. What if “screen time” might in the long run create a child who doesn’t want to do things for herself; someone who just waits to be entertained? Remember, the essence of creativity is being able to figure out something new. “Necessity is the mother of invention” is all about creative thought.

Creative thought begins in the pre-verbal time in your baby’s life, right now. Graham Wallis, the author of “The Art of Thought” offers four steps in the creative process: Preparation, incubation, illumination and verification. Preparation is finding the need or desire, defining the problem: “How to get that rattle.” Incubation is thinking about it, struggling to do it. Illumination is when the “light” comes on, “Aha, now I know what to do.” And verification is the trial, error, and testing to see if it can be done, “If I stretch this far I can get that rattle.”

The long-term effects of television, videos and “screen time” are still being studied. What we do know is that when babies are watching television and videos, they are not doing the normal developmental tasks of infancy and childhood. The work of a baby is to figure out how his body works, who you – his parents - are, and how you respond to his behavior. This is creative thought; this becomes the creative work of infancy.

A book you can find in the library or the bookstore is **Baby Minds: Brain-Building Games Your Baby Will Love**, by Linda Acredolo, Ph.D., and Susan Goodwyn, Ph.D., Bantam Books, New York, 2000. This book can help you understand the pace of your baby’s learning and offer simple activities to do with your baby. These authors, who also wrote **Baby Signs**, share wisdom and ideas that can make the day with your baby truly fun.

If you have friends or relatives with babies of similar ages, try to be careful about comparisons. It is tempting to compare, but remember, every baby develops at her own pace, all in her own good time. Parents become parents at their own pace as well. If you are a first time parent, try to be gentle with yourself. Everyone will want to give you advice and tell you what you should or should not be doing. Part of learning to be a parent is learning to trust yourself. We want our children to learn to trust themselves as they grow and mature as well.

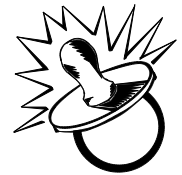
## TRUST



Sometimes it is not until we have children that we recognize that we really are amazingly responsible. As parents we find strengths we didn’t know we had. During the whole first year of life a baby is working on the most important task of a lifetime: **trust**. When you respond to your baby’s needs you let her know that her world is trustworthy and safe. When you hold her, comfort her, soothe her when she cries, feed her when she’s hungry, change her diapers when she’s wet, you are showing her your love, you are letting her know that she is in a safe space, that you will protect her. This is your job. Your gentle touch, soft words and smile mean the world to your baby. What does this expression really say, “*to mean the world to your baby?*”

How you handle and care for your baby becomes the model - the template or the framework - if you will – that shows your baby how he fits into the larger world. The immediate world of a baby is very small: his little bed, your lap, his car-seat, your arms and breast or bottle, your smiles and response, the comfort you provide when he cries and fusses. You are creating your baby’s picture of what he can expect in his world. This makes parenting a big responsibility, for in countless ways, your relationship with your baby determines his future. How he treats others will be reflection of how he is treated by you, his parents.

With a baby it is the tiny things that count. If this is your first baby you are realizing how much your life has changed in the last five months. If you have older children you realize that the addition of this new baby changes the whole family. A baby has a lot of power. And she is only five months old!



## CHILDCARE

If you need to go back to work you may already have child care available through family or friends. Finding safe, good care for your baby when you are away can cause a lot of worry for parents. In Skagit County, Child Care Resource and Referral can provide information for you as you begin your search.

### Child Care Resource and Referral

1934 E. College Way  
Mount Vernon WA 98273  
**360-416-8299**  
[www.voaww.org](http://www.voaww.org)

If you have moved away from Skagit County, “**Child Care Aware**” can help you find resources in your own community. **Child Care Aware** is located in Arlington, Virginia and if you call **1-800-424-2246** they can help you locate a Child Care Resource and Referral agency close to where you live.

Here are five steps to help you get started. This information is from Child Care Aware:

1. **Look.** Begin by visiting several child care homes or centers. What is your first impression? Does this look like a safe place for your child? Is it clean and orderly? Do the caregivers enjoy talking and playing with the infants and children? Are there toys and learning materials within reach of the children? You should always visit a center or home more than once and feel comfortable to stay and ask questions. When you start using the child care, visit often so you have a good picture of what the care will be like for your child.
2. **Listen.** What does the child care setting sound like? Do the children sound happy and involved? What about the teachers voices, are they cheerful and patient? You’ll want your visit to be long enough so you can see if there is a good balance between activities and play, discipline and structure.
3. **Count.** Count the number of children in the group, then count the number of staff members caring for them. The fewer the number of children for each adult, the more attention your child will receive. A small number of children per adult is most important for babies and younger children.
4. **Ask.** It’s very important that the adults who care for your children have the knowledge and experience to give them the attention they need. Ask about the background and experience of all staff. Find out about the special training each one has and whether the program is licensed or accredited. Quality care providers and teachers will be happy to have you ask these questions.
5. **Be Informed.** Find out more about the efforts in your community to improve the quality of child care. Is your caregiver involved in these activities? How can you get involved? For more information, please Contact your local **Child Care Resource and Referral Center**, in Skagit County, **360-416-8299**.



Some families would like a Nanny to come to their home. When searching for a Nanny, it is critical for the safety of all involved to run a thorough Background Check. Families assume responsibility for all background verification of a nanny candidate. These checks typically

involve a few options and usually take just a few days to get results. Listed below are the background checks you may obtain: Driving Records; Credit Reports; Drug Testing; Past Employment Verification; Education Verification; and Criminal Records.

Nanny Background Checks: <http://www.nannies4hire.com/backgroundchecks.asp>

It can be quite an adjustment to stay home alone all day with a baby especially if you have been out in the world and working and this is your first time staying home all day. WELCOME BABY! offers a number of groups for parents, please check out our website: [www.welcomebabywa.org](http://www.welcomebabywa.org) for group times and locations. Our **Mother-Baby Play Time on Tuesdays from 2:00 – 4:00 p.m.** at St. Paul's Church, 415 S. 18<sup>th</sup> Street in Mount Vernon is a nice place to come and meet other first time parents. Dads and grandparents are always welcome.

*Meredith Baker © 2007*

For first-time parents, we have a **Mother-Baby Play Time** (Dads are welcome, too!) every Tuesday afternoon from 2:00 – 4:00. This drop-in group meets in the Family Birth Center Waiting Room, Skagit Valley Hospital in Mount Vernon. Please call for more information, **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 6 months old.*