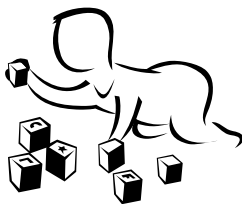


WELCOME BABY Newsletter for 6 Months

Dear Parents,

By now you are really getting to know your baby. Can you tell what her temperament is? Is she easy? Difficult? Slow to warm up? Can she adjust fairly smoothly to change, new people or foods? Does she need lots of reassurance and comforting to adjust to new situations? “Slow to warm up babies” watch and try to figure things out, they seem cautious until they are comfortable and they appear to be shy. Of course you know these things about your baby already, but now her personality is beginning to assert itself.

Six month old babies are so in love with you! And who better to play with and explore, than you. Your baby will be putting his fingers in your mouth, grabbing your glasses, trying to get your attention with sound effects. You are the best “toy” in the world. Your baby is probably developing a sense of humor and thinks it’s funny when you wrinkle your nose or shut your eyes and pop them open again. Does he find your animal noises as hilarious as you do? And he is beginning to assert himself, reach for things – get them - and maybe even drag himself along the floor, feet kicking in the air.



This is an excellent time to read to him, just before he really takes off crawling, otherwise, who cares about a story? *“I have places to go!”* **The developmental range for learning to crawl lasts many months, just as teething does.** Some infants have their first tooth at about 6 months and others not until almost a year. Every baby is unique and it is important not to feel overwhelmed by comparisons. There will always be a time when we as parents feel especially vulnerable and get our feelings hurt. Make a list of your questions to ask your doctor at your next visit. And be careful about ‘information overload’. Babies can easily feel overwhelmed with too much excitement and stimulation and so can parents!

Remember, all this “instant information” from television, books, magazines and the internet did not exist a generation ago. It is tempting to want to know and watch everything right away and get as much information as possible.

Learning to trust oneself is a large part of being a parent. Whether this is our first or sixth child, we have as much to learn about ourselves as about our baby.

The book, **Infants and Mothers: Differences in Development**, (by Dr. T. Berry Brazelton, Delta, 1983) explores ways we are both alike and different from our babies and helps us to understand the unique style and temperament of one’s own growing baby. See if your library has a copy of this book.

MEALTIME

By now you may have introduced some solid foods and been sprayed in the face with rice cereal. Getting the cereal neither too wet nor too dry takes some practice and you’ll enjoy all the facial expressions your baby makes as she greets new flavors. When she accomplishes the **pincer grasp**, being able to pick up things with her thumb and first finger, you’ll find that her favorite foods are Cheerios and peas, things she can feed herself. (One is tempted to call it the **pincher grasp**, just wait until you get pinched in the nose!)

Your baby will have fun playing with the bowl and spoon and mealtime will be messy. One wonders if he’ll get enough to eat, but when he’s had enough, you’ll know. Watch for what are called “**engagement cues**” and “**disengagement cues**”. These are signals your baby gives you. When he wants to have your attention or to eat more, he’ll open his eyes wide and like a little bird open his mouth for the spoon. But when he’s had enough, he’ll turn



away, shut his mouth tight, sputter and ignore you. Give him time to pull himself together, then, gently offer him more. If he really doesn't want any, simply say, "Looks like you are finished," and end the mealtime. Remember, he'll be watching your facial expression and imitating it!

Public Health has a number of resources for you and will be happy to answer questions about feeding your baby. Public Health nurses have had specialized training in a variety of breastfeeding and food issues and can make home visits if you have particular concerns. Please call our WELCOME BABY! line for the Health Department nearest you, 360-419-3324.

PLAY-TIME

So much of play is imitating and copying, or repeating an action to see what happens. Playing with your baby can be wonderfully silly: making noises and funny faces, hiding under a blanket, popping out and saying, "peek-a-boo." **Play is the work of infants and children**; it is how they learn. It is how we learned as children. "Peek-a-boo" is about **object permanence**: "*Is something still there even if I can't see it?*"

Cause and effect is another important concept your baby is learning about everyday. He might drop a spoon and watch it hit the floor. When you pick it up and put it back on the tray, he might drop it again, for your "picking it up" has become part of the 'effect'. You and your baby will "play" at "cause and effect" for many months. You'll get tired of this before he does and when you do, move him gently to another activity. It's OK for you to get bored, but, remember, this "game" is not a bit boring to your baby!



Your baby is so smart, you'll begin to think she's doing things "just to get you". She learns from cause and effect and **your response to her tells her a lot**. In this context of give and take your baby decides whether she enjoys life or not. Your smiles and laughter – and patience - literally mean the world to her.

For babies this age, play with you is what they like best. Your baby will soon want so much of your attention that you'll find it hard to get dressed. But **rest and sleep and quiet time are important**, too. When your baby is playing quietly or just staring at shadows on the wall, let her be, she needs quiet reflective time just as you do. Babies learn by play and by **watching and listening**. Speaking of watching and listening, let's talk about television.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no television (or videos) until a child is two years old. That might seem like a long time especially if you watch a lot of T.V. But remember, we still don't know the long-term effects of prolonged television viewing on children's brains. We do know that when infants and children are watching television they are not doing the normal developmental tasks of childhood: interacting with the people they love, fooling around with stuff during play, practicing fine and large motor skills, and listening.

LANGUAGE

Your baby is listening to you talk. He is trying to make sense of the sounds of language, the sounds within words, which are called phonemes. He is watching you and listening, even when you think he's just dozing, he is listening to the give and take of conversation, (it is sort of like music to him). From now until his first birthday the sounds he hears help him prepare to pronounce words later on.

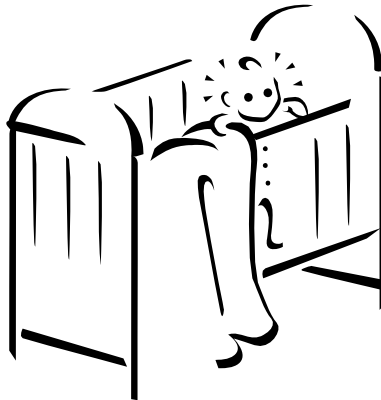
The word sounds your baby hears are the "building blocks" for her ability to learn to speak. **Babies prefer the sounds of their parents' voices** and they especially enjoy the sing-song style that grown-ups use when they talk to them. The sing-song style actually has a name, it is called "motherese" or "parentese" and people use it all over the world when they talk to babies, no matter what language they speak. ("*Motherese*" is different from what we think of as "*baby-talk*" a cutesy way of making up words like milky-wilky).

One of the main reasons we talk so much about reading to tiny babies is so that they'll hear a wide variety of different words and sounds during this important language development time; besides, it's just plain fun. Television viewing is a form of passive learning; remember, **babies are active learners**, excited about what you offer them.

There are other sounds, too. It is easy to accustom your baby to constant interaction with you and neglect the importance of letting her just listen to the normal sounds of a household: the sound of your feet on the floor, your steps coming to get her; the refrigerator door opening; water running in the sink; the clink of dishes; mail coming through the slot. All this gives her information. "Oh, the mail is here," you might say. Your baby is a little scientist trying to figure out her world. Give her plenty of opportunity to watch what you are doing, and talk through your tasks out loud if it feels natural to you. Watching and observing your work and routine is something she'll be very good at. When she needs your attention, she'll let you know.

The book, **The Scientist in the Crib, Minds, Brains, and How Children Learn**, by Alison Gopnik, Ph.D., Andrew N. Meltzoff, Ph.D., and Patricia K. Kuhl, Ph.D., (William Morrow and Co., New York, 1999), gives us this wonderful quote:

"Walk upstairs, open the door gently, and look in the crib. What do you see? Most of us see a picture of innocence and helplessness, a clean slate. But, in fact, what we see in the crib is the greatest mind that has ever existed, the most powerful learning machine in the universe."



So enjoy your baby, you have everything you need: your lap, your voice, your beautiful smile.

Meredith Baker © 2005

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 7 months old