

# WELCOME BABY Newsletter for 7 Months

Dear Parents,

Seven months old! Is your baby on the move? Is she beginning to scoot? Is she beginning to creep along the floor trying to get somewhere? This is a time of great adventure. Seven-month-old babies like to look around and see what's out there that they can reach. Some babies seem like they will start to crawl any minute and others still want to sit and watch. Some are still mastering sitting without support. With all the learning your baby does, you are probably already beginning to see a pattern. Does your baby start right away and try to figure things out for herself? Or is she one to hold back and watch?

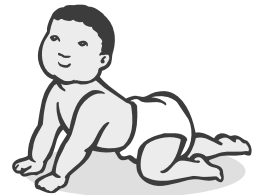
Your baby's learning style is forming, and over time, this style becomes an ingredient in his self-confidence. As a baby works to learn new skills parents and caregivers influence his sense of self, and self-esteem, by how they respond to him.

Children learn early that there is an "event" – something that happens. For example, a baby learns to get up on his knees. Then there is the "response" – what the parent does or says. This response is what determines the "outcome" for the child – how the child feels about what he just did. It is a simple little formula,  $E + R = O$ .\*  
An event, plus the response equals the outcome.

What does this have to do with learning style? "Style" of learning does not measure intelligence, but it is a description of how we learn. We know that there is a difference in babies' temperaments, some are "easy," some "difficult," and some "slow to warm up." Often we notice that there is a parallel in how children learn. For some babies certain things come easily, like the big motor skills, sitting up and crawling. For others, those tasks seem to take longer. Some babies have an easier time with the babbling beginnings of speech, making consonant sounds like "da-da" and "ba-ba." The "slow to warm up" baby may take time learning new skills and want to watch and wait before meeting new people, or tasting new foods, or trying to crawl. Everything your baby does is a learning experience. How do we help our baby's self esteem grow while he learns?

## SELF-ESTEEM

Self-esteem: what is it? And how do we foster it in our children? Is it enough to just keep saying, "Good boy," or "Good girl," or "Good job?"



One definition of self-esteem came from some long-term work in a school district in California. This is my favorite definition. Here it is: **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.** So how does this apply to a seven month old baby?

Your baby wants to feel good about herself. She already does. Every time you smile and call her by her name and she smiles back at you – well, you both feel good. You treat your baby with gentle kindness, you respect her rate of growth and development and her accomplishments. In all probability, especially if this is your first baby, you probably had no idea you could love someone so much.

But what about that middle part, "Having the character to be accountable for one's own actions?" Is that something the baby is supposed to do? Of course not, but as parents we model this in how we treat and interact with our partners, spouses and children. This is the "R" in the  $E + R = O$  formula. This reflects our own behavior, our response to what happens and to what our baby does.

For example, if a baby's learning style is "slow to warm up" or shy, and we as parents, respect that shyness and give baby lots of security and safety – in other words, let him take the time he needs to watch and warm up, then he knows that he is respected. If he is struggling to reach a toy, and we acknowledge his hard work and say, "Look how far you are stretching your arms; keep kicking, you'll reach it," we encourage his effort. Do these words mean anything to a seven-month-old? Isn't it easier just to say, "Good job?"

## LANGUAGE

From a baby's point of view, the words, "Good job," can apply to almost anything from nursing well, to being cooperative when his diaper is changed, to being able to sit up. If you keep on saying, "Good job," every time baby does something, what do you say when she pulls your glasses off? "Bad job?" That sounds weird. What about the "No!" word? Do babies know what that means at seven months? I don't think they really do, but they sure know when you are unhappy with their behavior. If you frown, baby frowns, nobody's happy. What can you say when she pulls your glasses off a second time? How come she didn't figure it out when you said, "No" in the first place? She's the smartest baby in the world, right?



Seven months is an amazing time for language learning. Your baby is interested in everything on your face: your mouth, your eyes, your glasses, inside your nose, it's almost embarrassing. But where do words come from? How do you make them? What are they saying, and what do they mean? **This is the time of language input.** Any minute now your baby is going to find your cell phone. And why is that so interesting? Because you use it to **talk**. Talking is all about stringing words together to make thoughts come out of our heads. We can't even remember how we ourselves got from "ba-ba" to yammering away in full sentences. It just happened. It happens to babies, in all languages, in all countries, in much the same way. Parents talk to babies and the more words they use, the more interesting it is for babies to connect the words to their actions.



And that's why "Good job" isn't enough by itself; it really doesn't say anything. It might take a bit more practice, but try describing to your baby exactly what he's doing. *"You are kicking your feet... You are rolling over – and over... You are splashing your legs in the water... Look at you, reaching for the cat; oh, the cat walked away... You are banging your spoon on the highchair and it's making a lot of noise... You are poking your finger in your nose, I'm glad it's your nose and not mine... Hey, how did you get a hold of that remote."*

### SAYING "YES"

So what do you say instead of, "No?" You say, "Yes." When he grabs your cell phone, you can say, "Yes, I know you want that phone, but right now I am going to give you this nice block with a bell in it to play with instead." And gently you take away the phone and give him the block at the very same time. You are saying, "Yes" to his desire, not "Yes" to his behavior. Right now this is mostly practice, but in a few months you'll find yourself needing to say "Yes" a lot. Your baby will be into everything.



Remember, your baby is the smartest baby in the whole wide world and she's working very hard right now to figure you out. She wants to know that you are there, that you won't get too far out of sight, that you'll protect her if she's shy with strangers all of a sudden – babies this age often are. When you say, "Yes, I know you feel a little shy right now. I'll hold you until you are ready, I'll keep you safe." You are providing her the security that will stay with her for the rest of her life. This stage of clinging and what seems like stranger anxiety is an important part of her development. It's what Dr. T. Berry Brazelton calls "person permanence." It's related of course to "object permanence," that enjoyment your baby finds in playing peek-a-boo and games where you cover up a toy and then uncover it again and baby sees that it's still there.

Your baby is beginning to say "Yes" to you, too! He knows who loves him best, he loves to laugh and play with you. As he begins to move about, you might think about a playpen for times when you want to cook supper or take a shower. As your baby begins to say "Yes" to all sorts of exploration on the floor and on the rug, you'll want to do a close child-proofing of your house again. As he begins to use his new **pincer grasp** skill he'll like picking up tiny things like fuzz on the carpet or a tiny pin that's been overlooked. Of course, everything he finds will go straight into his mouth. Yes, child-proofing can be fun! Get down on the floor at baby's level and crawl around, even the best vacuum cleaner can't match a seven-month-old with speedy fingers and sharp eyes.

## MEALTIME

Let's just say it's messy. Everything has to be explored, mushed, mashed and dropped off the high chair to see where it lands. You might try letting your baby play with one spoon while you try to get something in her mouth



with another. Playing with her food seems like a lot more fun to her than eating right now and many parents worry that she won't get enough. Dr. Brazelton has some good advice in his **Touchpoints** book, (your library should have a copy). The main thing is, try not to get frustrated! This messing about with food doesn't last forever. Here are some little rhymes to sing while trying to feed your busy little one.

**Hey Diddle, Diddle**

Hey diddle, diddle,  
The cat and the fiddle,  
The cow jumped over the moon.  
The little dog laughed  
To see such sport,  
And the dish ran away  
With the spoon.

**Pease Porridge**

Pease porridge hot,  
Pease Porridge cold,  
Pease porridge in the pot,  
Nine days old.

after,

Some like it hot,  
Some like it cold,  
Some like it in the pot,  
Nine days old.

**Hot-Cross Buns**

Hot-cross Buns!  
Hot-cross Buns!  
One a penny, two a penny,  
Hot-cross Buns!  
Hot-cross Buns!  
Hot-cross Buns!  
If ye have no daughters,  
Give them to your sons.

**Hot Boiled Beans**

Ladies and gentlemen come to supper --  
Hot boiled beans and very good butter.

**Jack Sprat**

Jack Sprat could eat no fat,  
His wife could eat no lean,  
And so betwixt the two of them,  
They licked the platter clean.

**Hey Ding a Ding**

Hey ding a ding, what shall I sing?  
How many holes in a skimmer?  
Four-and-twenty. My stomach is empty;  
Pray, mamma, give me some dinner.

**NURSERY RHYMES**

Some make sense, some make no sense, so why are they good for babies? They have rhythm, they have rhyme, they have all the sounds about and around. You can sing them, you can say them. When you hear them when you're little, you'll know them when you're big.

And why does this matter? Rhyming is one of the building blocks for learning to read. Babies between 6-12 months of age are listening like crazy for your words, so that when they begin to talk, all the sounds that words can make will be there in their minds. It is an amazing process. Please don't be tempted to think your baby will learn to talk from television and videos. Babies learn to talk from the adults and other children in their immediate world. You may already have found how much your baby likes you to sing, in the car, before nap and bedtime, when you need to distract him from something. Babies love rhythm and rhyme – even if you can't hold a tune or are embarrassed to sing, chant out the nursery rhymes. Here is a website that can lead to you all sorts of songs for babies and young children: <http://www.niehs.nih.gov/kids/musicchild.htm>.

**REFERENCES**

**Touchpoints: The Essential Reference**, T. Berry Brazelton, M.D., Perseus Books, Reading, MA, 1992.

**Parenting Young Children**, Dinkmeyer and McKay, American Guidance Service, Inc. Circle Pines, Minnesota

**The Real Mother Goose**, Rand McNally & Co., Chicago, Illinois (49<sup>th</sup> printing, July, 1966)

\* **E+R=O**, this formula I learned from Jack Canfield who wrote **Chicken Soup for the Soul**.

If you can, please come sometime to our **Mother-Baby Play Time** (dads are always welcome!). **Tuesdays, 2:00-4:00pm** at St. Paul's Church, 415 S. 18<sup>th</sup> Street, Mount Vernon. Call for more information or just come by, we have a lot of fun and it's a nice place to meet other first time parents. Take good care of yourselves and enjoy your beautiful baby!

*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 8 months old.*