

# WELCOME BABY Newsletter for 8 Months

Dear Parents,

Who is working the hardest in your household? You or your eight-month-old baby? Just think of all the things your beautiful baby has learned since she was born, and now, perched on the edge of crawling – maybe already crawling – your baby is moving right along. This is a time when parents often wonder if their baby is doing what every other baby is supposed to be doing. Perhaps you have a friend or family member whose baby is crawling all over the place and your baby is still trying to be steady while she sits. Remember, all babies develop at their own pace, but if you have questions about your baby's development, please talk to your doctor or a Public Health Nurse. You may always call WELCOME BABY! 360-419-3324, and we'll help you sort out what's going on. Home visits are always free.



*Sometimes parents wonder what's going on with themselves. It's a big change to have a new baby and for parents – and especially mothers – who work right up to the time of baby's birth, staying home alone all day with a baby can be difficult; the day can seem very long and parents wonder why they can't seem to get anything done. By now your "baby blues" should have lifted, but if you find yourself still feeling down, sad or irritable, or if you are having trouble sleeping or concentrating, please don't hesitate to call. Having a chance to talk through your feelings is often all it takes to feel better. There is no charge for any WELCOME BABY! service; all visits are confidential.*

Not long ago in our Mother-Baby group we had a little fellow who was eight-months-old and he was completely entranced by a big green ball. He couldn't crawl yet, but was able to scoot on his tummy and drag himself with his arms, inch by inch across the floor toward the ball, his feet kicking out behind him like little propellers. His concentration was really something. Just as he would get close to the ball and touch it with his fingers or his nose, it would, of course, roll away. He would try again to get closer and someone would roll the ball back toward him and he would inch ahead again. For more than ten minutes he worked incredibly totally focused on his task, his eyes shining. Why is it that concentration is so important for a baby's development?

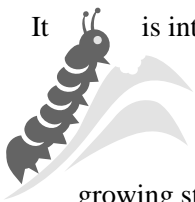
## **FOCUSING, CONCENTRATION and ATTACHMENT**



What is it we want for our children? We want them to be responsible, trustworthy, kind, considerate, compassionate and smart. We want them to be able to stay with a project and to love learning. We want them to be able to problem-solve and be patient. We want them to be able to deal with frustration and disappointment. We want them to be happy and to love the life that has been given to them.

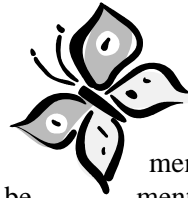
Sometimes, as parents, we think we need to do more, give more – of time, presents, toys, books, money, and it's easy to feel guilty that we might not be doing enough. When we watch an eight-month-old playing with a ball on the floor, we learn a lot of things: he is happy, he is learning, he is concentrating, he is focused, he is working hard, he is playing. We might feel sorry for him if he gets frustrated trying to reach a toy, but does that mean we need to step in right away and get it for him? Is he asking for help or is he so focused on his goal that he is intent on reaching it?

The ability to focus began when your baby gazed into your eyes for the first time, and you and she looked at one another with all the love in the world. Every time you looked into the eyes of your new baby, every time you spoke to her, she was getting to know you. By now she has a pretty good sense that you, her parents, are the most wonderful people in the world; in many ways, you are her world. As she begins to move about across the room, she will check back with you to make sure you are still there. You are her secure base. When strangers approach, she may cling to you in ways she didn't a few months ago. What's going on?



It is interesting that when babies begin to scoot around and crawl, they seem to cling more to their parents. It's as though for every one step forward there's one step back – and the back-step is to make sure that you are keeping him safe. Safe: both physically and emotionally. Even when your baby is busy playing, he is keeping you in his mind. This takes a level of concentration. In the next few months you may see that it is sometimes difficult for your baby to separate from you and that's because his attachment to you is growing stronger day by day.

When she goes to childcare, your baby still keeps her thoughts on you. Babies this age can make many relationships, but they certainly know whom their parents are. All day your baby keeps the image of you in her mind. When she is back with you at the end of the day, she may cry, simply with the relief of being with the people she loves best. She keeps an image of you in her mind all day, just as you keep your heart on her. You are attached to one another. Sometimes it's hard to concentrate on your own work because you are thinking about your baby. She's thinking about you, too.



## **MENTAL HEALTH**

When we hear the words “mental health” we often think of crazy, there's nothing wrong with me.” So what does it mean to be mentally healthy? If we want our children to be **responsible, trustworthy, kind, considerate, compassionate and smart**, how do we make this happen? And when does one begin? Why, you've already started. The following are qualities and actions that help us all to be mentally healthy:

### **Anticipation**

This is about planning ahead and being prepared. Going to childcare, taking a trip to Grandmother's house, going shopping, all these require planning and preparation. Anticipation is how we go about getting ready for change, and how we make transitions from one activity or place to another. As parents we help by explaining to our children what is coming next. For ourselves we make lists and check things off; we plan ahead and try to take stock of our feelings. Are we nervous, excited? What do we need to remember to do? Babies and young children like predictability and helping them anticipate what is coming next makes them feel secure.

### **Affiliation**

Affiliation is all about making relationships. Person to person, parent to parent, parent to child, child to friend, friend to community, community to world. You, as parents, are the model for all other relationships your children will have in life; and later as your children develop friendships of their own, they become models for other children. The ability to make good and lasting friendships is a basis for health and well-being.



### **Altruism**

This is the principle and practice of seeking the welfare of others. This is the opposite of being self-centered. An infant is supposed to be self-centered, and is. For most of his first year, a baby has all his needs met by you, his parents. By the very nature of having a baby we put into practice our altruistic best. All that getting up in the night and changing diapers! What role models you are as parents, for patience and good will!

### **Sense of Humor**

How can you get through life without a sense of humor? And there is certainly no way to parent children without one.

One daddy trying most unsuccessfully to read to his busy baby made up this song: “It's a book, it's a book. You can read it, you can fold it, you can eat it, you can throw it!” The key is not to try too hard. Remember to laugh and remind yourselves that this too will pass – especially while the cereal is being poured on your head while you are wiping up under the highchair.



### **Self Observation**

This is something we develop over time and learn at our parent's knee. We learn to see how others see us; we learn to reflect on our own words and behavior. It's a little bit related to “practice what you preach.” The encouraging words we say to children – as opposed to the criticisms –help them learn, eventually, to see themselves as others see them. When we say “Yes” to children, (“*Yes, I know you want to pull the cat's tail, but let me help you pat her gently*”) we let children know we value their desires, while at the same time, we re-direct them to positive actions. This helps tremendously in the very important task of learning impulse control.

## Self Assertion

This is the magic place between being aggressive and being a wimp. This is where we learn manners, kindness and respect for others. Self-assertiveness helps us move through the world, our work and relationships with greater gentleness and ease. When someone asks, "Where would you like to eat?" And, to be nice, we say, "I don't care, wherever you want." If we always say this, eventually we might set ourselves up for disappointment and resentment. We've all said at one time or another, "You never do what I want to do." Well, we need to learn – and teach our children – how to speak up for ourselves, nicely and with respect.

## Sublimation

In so many ways, this is the secret to happiness; having something to do, especially at times when you feel lonely, bored, down or frustrated. It means having at least one, or a variety of things to do, that are satisfying: baking bread, fixing the lawnmower, making yogurt, knitting a sweater, playing a musical instrument, walking the dog, painting a picture, organizing photos, playing sports. These are all things your children will want to learn. And who are the best teachers? You, of course, and don't be fooled by television and videos, children need to learn with their hands and often with their whole bodies.

## Suppression

Let's just say, "If someone throws up on the bus, don't think about it." Don't talk about it either. You've heard the expression, "Just get over it!" There are many things we need to get over – and this is different from denial. We aren't saying things didn't happen, we just don't want to stay stuck.



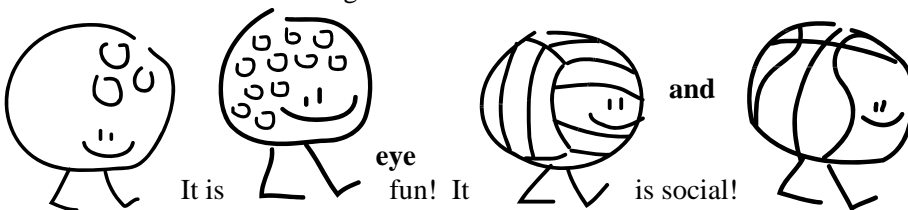
*Moving right along.....If you were to look at this list and think about these things, how are you doing? Sometimes we need to ask questions and find support. **Sometimes we need to stop and count up our good points.***

**LOOKING and LISTENING**

Remember the little fellow I mentioned at the beginning of this letter, the eight-month-old with the big green ball? If he were watching television or a video (even one supposedly to make him more brainy) would that be any more fun for him? I don't think so. Why is that?



Balls are almost the perfect toy: they come in all sizes, they roll, they can be rolled back again. A newborn baby's eyes can follow a small red ball when it moves across the line of his vision. A four-month-old can grasp a small ball in his hands. An eight-month-old can push the ball across the room and as soon as he crawls, can go after it. A one-year-old can reach down and pick up a small ball from the floor and get back to a standing position, more or less. Then the toddler can throw the ball and as he grows he will learn to catch.



It is eye fun! It is social!

**Playing with a ball requires good vision concentration. It requires depth perception and focus; it develops hand-coordination.**

Playing with a ball involves: anticipation, affiliation, altruism (sometimes we'd rather read the paper but we're out there playing catch). If we think about it, it involves all the elements of good mental health, and we sure don't want to dwell on it when we flub the catch. Playing with a ball means a baby moves in a three dimensional world.

**We want our vision to last a lifetime and the most important time for learning to focus and concentrate is in baby's first year. No amount of television viewing or educational videos for baby can replace the work your baby will do on her own.** Besides looking at you (and playing ball) she wants to hear your voice; she'd rather listen to you sing any old day than listen to anything else.

You are probably saying right now, "But what about Mozart?" Mozart's great and so is Mahler, Meyerbeer and Mendelssohn, Beethoven, Brahms, Bach, and Buxtehude. But my advice is, when you play classical music for your baby, play the whole piece. Get to know some great music. It's great for sublimating. A little King FM never hurt anyone.

Oh, have fun, get out there and play, and call me with any questions. Take good care of yourselves and enjoy your beautiful baby!

*Meredith Baker ©2007*



*Roll your ball and roll it back, roll it one time more. See what fun your ball can have, rolling on the floor...*

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 9 months old.*