

MOM and Baby

A Baby Talk Newsletter brought to you by Little Company of Mary Hospital

Dear Parents,

This newsletter is a follow up to the Newborn Encounter visit you received during your stay at Little Company of Mary Hospital. Congratulations on the birth of your new baby!

We at Baby TALK are very happy for you and believe that parenting your child is one of the most important jobs you will ever do. Babies demand much time, energy and patience, but they give back even more in terms of love, joy and satisfaction as you watch them grow and develop.

Almost every parent feels overwhelmed at times from the enormous responsibility of raising a child. Baby TALK understands the challenges parents face and hopes that the arrival of our regular newsletters will be of help to you.

Of all the things you will be giving your baby in the years to come, none will be as important as your relationship with him. This bond started during pregnancy and grows each day that you interact with each other.

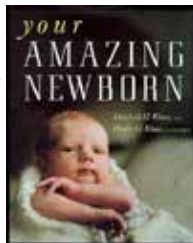
Many parents worry about how they will establish this strong relationship with their babies. The good news is that your baby is working as hard as you are to establish this bond! Babies are amazingly programmed to seek out and establish this relationship with their parents. They are born with a number of abilities which are designed to encourage this bond. A parent's job, therefore, is simply to respond to your baby's signals: holding him when he cries, feeding him when he is hungry, changing him when he is wet, talking and singing to him when he is ready and attuned to you.

You may be interested in reading about the wonderful abilities of infants and about the process of parent-infant attachment. One outstanding book you may like:

Your Amazing Newborn

by Dr. Marshall H. Klaus. Perseus, 2000.

Dr. Klaus provides insight on the abilities of newborns in this fascinating book. Parents have always believed



that their babies are capable individuals. This book provides some convincing evidence. We hope it will "amaze" you as it has us!

THE BABY BLUES

Your baby may be doing a lot of crying at this point. Most babies (85%!) between three weeks and three months of age have some fussy crying each day that is not from hunger or any other cause you can identify. Usually this crying is a way to dispel energy from an overloaded central nervous system. This fussy crying is not your "fault" or the baby's "fault"! You can be assured that your baby is not crying because of anything you are doing wrong!

It is important to respond to your baby as quickly as possible when he cries. You cannot "spoil" a young infant by picking him up when he cries! If you are concerned that your baby's crying seems "excessive", ask your baby's doctor about it.

MOTHER GOOSE

For some reason, the sense of rhythm seems to comfort infants. Rhythmic movements, such as: walking, rocking, and swaying



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are comforting to babies. In the same way, rhythmic sounds are enjoyed by babies. Why? Perhaps rhythmic language reminds babies of a much-loved sound heard prior to birth: the sound of mother's heartbeat. For whatever reason, babies around the world have enjoyed the sound of nursery rhymes chanted softly by parents and grandparents through the centuries. Nursery rhymes comfort newborns and often coax them to relax. Older babies delight in the playtime they associate with nursery rhymes as you incorporate them into their daily routine, such as "Rub-a-dub-dub, three men in a tub" during bath, or "This little piggy went to market" when dressing.

Mother goose rhymes are for young children and bring great delight in their repeating. Do you remember those rhymes from your childhood? Share them with your baby.

THERE'S A REAL PERSON IN THERE!

You are probably noticing that your baby has some quiet times when he seems to "tune in" to you. You can encourage your baby and prolong that attention by talking to him and making eye contact with him during these times. When he pauses during a feeding, he is waiting for you to respond to him. These pauses will grow in length as he enjoys this interaction with you.

After tuning in to you or another interesting object for a few moments, you'll notice that your baby will turn away. This is his way of saying that his system is overloaded and that "playtime" is over. In time, he will be able to pay attention for longer and longer periods.

At around two months of age, most babies start smiling their first real social smiles. What a rewarding response! Many babies actually make a brief cooing sound as they attempt to communicate.

It is at about this age that you will also notice that your baby responds differently to the different people in his life. He will use his body differently with Mom, with Dad and with other people. He is beginning to differentiate the role each will play in his life and is already changing his behavior to suit his relationship with each person.

The changes you have been seeing in your baby will continue at an amazing rate in the months to come. You will receive another Baby TALK newsletter describing some of these changes in two months when your child is four months old.

Please notify us if your email address changes before that time - volunteer@lcmh.org.



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Your baby is a very different person than he was just two short months ago! Isn't it incredible how rapidly changes occur in the earliest months of human life? It is an exciting time to be a parent, even if it is exhausting!

For most four-month-old infants, life is somewhat more settled than it was a short while ago. Your baby probably cries less than he did earlier because his central nervous system is better able to handle the many sensations in his world. His schedule is probably becoming more predictable. You may be feeling a little more in control of your life now, because a schedule for your days is emerging.

LAUGHING OUT LOUD

You are undoubtedly relieved that your baby may be crying less, and generally seems to be enjoying the world more these days. Three to six-month-old babies are often noted for the frequency of their good moods. You have probably noticed that your baby has become much more sociable, responding easily to play and conversation. Many babies at this age even begin laughing out loud—a real delight to hear.

However, two new challenges may turn your baby's laughter back to tears: the anxiety of stranger awareness and the discomfort of teething. Sometime in the weeks to come, you may notice that your baby is no longer happy to be passed around from one adult to another. He may look warily at strangers and appear to want no part of them. When he has been cared for by another adult, he may fall apart and burst into tears when you return to "rescue" him! Although all this crying is costly to both of you, it's a good sign of a strong attachment growing between you. He is expressing as clearly as he knows how that he loves you best.

Another cause for crying at this stage is the beginning of teething. Some babies suffer a great deal with this discomfort which is thought to feel something like a painful splinter in a finger. Your



baby is probably teething if he cries out when you press on his gums. Some babies even refuse to suck because their gums hurt. Try rubbing your baby's gums before feeding to lessen the pain. For most infants, teeth don't begin to appear until six-nine months. Your baby may be teething for some time!

HE DOESN'T MISS A THING

One of the most exciting changes at this time of your child's life is the cognitive burst that usually happens at about four-and-a-half-months of age. Suddenly, most babies become very aware of everything around them and intent on learning about everything in their environments. It is thrilling to watch your child "tune in" to the world at this time.

Unfortunately, this new curiosity and awareness can present some real challenges for parents! One example is in the area of feeding. Your baby may simply be unable to finish eating because he is so distracted by the sight and sounds around him. Both breast and bottle-feeding parents report their frustration in getting through a feeding uninterrupted at this stage. And, of course, interacting with you is the biggest distraction of all, as feeding continues to be about more than just food. Your baby loves the play that occurs between you during those meals.



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Try to remember that your baby won't starve, and surely will get enough milk to sustain life during this exciting time! Also, remember that he has probably become a very efficient nurser and may complete a feeding in a very short time.

THE NIGHT OWL

Another part of your life that may be complicated by this cognitive burst is your child's ability to sleep through the night. Perhaps you have finally arrived at the point at which your child is sleeping for a longer period at night, maybe even eight hours. What a relief! And then at about four-and-a-half-months he may start waking again every four hours. WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

Your child's life is composed of four-hour cycles of sleeping and waking. Even though he may not be really awake after four hours of sleep, your baby may be cycling through a time of light sleep. Instead of going back down into deeper sleep, he becomes aware of the world around him and wakes himself up by crying out.

Parents can encourage a self-comforting routine - helping babies find their thumb or pacifier, patting them gently on the bottom, humming softly, but not taking them out of the crib - this night waking will likely last only a short time. Babies who have learned to comfort themselves back to sleep often return to sleeping through the night.

Another practice which can begin to encourage good sleeping habits at this age is establishing a supportive bedtime routine. At bedtime, feed your baby, rock him, sing to him, hold him close, and then put him in his crib before he goes to sleep. He will become comfortable with being in his bed, still awake, and then falling to sleep on his own.



If you would like to learn more about managing your baby's sleep, you may be interested in reading Sleep: The Brazelton Way by Brazelton and Sparrow (Perseus, 2003). This little book provides information on infant sleep behaviors and routines.

BABY'S BODY

You have probably noticed a tremendous change in your baby's ability to control his own body. Now, when you pull him up to a sit, his head doesn't fall back but rather remains upright. When laid on his tummy, he may push up on his arms. He may even roll over! And when on his back, he enjoys holding his feet in the air and kicking.

He has also discovered how to use his hands. At first he was only able to bat and swipe at objects. Now, he delights in being able to reach and grasp them, which he will continue to do with increasing accuracy in the months to come! Your baby is learning to bring all of his senses together to accomplish what he wants to do: He hears an object, turns his head toward the sound, sees the object, reaches for the object, holds the object, shakes the object to reproduce the sound, and eventually mouths the object. What an accomplishment! Your baby has had to master many new skills to get where he is now.

Upon arriving at his new level of abilities, your baby will become a more active "player" in his environment. He can really begin to "make things happen and to pursue his own desire to learn."

Although this is a very exciting time, it may also be a dangerous time. Not only will your baby put his teething toys into his mouth, but he will also taste every paper clip, button, bug, and piece of lint that crosses his path. Now is the time to thoroughly babyproof your child's environment. Pick up all small items, put "shock stops" in electrical outlets, leave no cords dangling, and put all chemical substances out of reach. Your baby's abilities will out-distance his common sense for the next few years!

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Can you believe that a HALF YEAR has passed since your little one was born? And what changes you have seen in him! He is mostly content, happy, curious about the world, and loves to be held—the real “picture book” baby that you probably hoped for throughout your pregnancy. The most appealing thing about six-month-olds is that they are so in love with their parents. The attachment between you is well on its way. Your baby sees you as unique from all other people and has decided that he likes you best. He is probably wary of strangers and maybe even grandparents. Warn them that they might need to approach your baby slowly if they haven't seen him for a while.

As your baby begins his explorations of the world, he is most interested in exploring YOU. As you hold him, he is apt to put his fingers in your mouth and ears and pull your hair, a part of him loving you and wanting to be part of your life, combined with his natural curiosity at this age.

You have already learned that the changes your baby will experience can make life something of a roller-coaster ride for you. Parents are often caught off-guard by the challenges they face with every new stage of their child's development. It may help to have a “road map” to help prepare you for these challenges and to enable you to enjoy your child's every stage. BabyTALK recommends a book written by Dr. T. Berry Brazelton entitled Touchpoints, Addison-Wesley, 1992.

Touchpoints is a parent's guide to the early years of a child's life. Every aspect of life is explored (feeding, sleeping, play, and physical development, to name a few) and placed into the context of how a child's development affects the family at every stage. Through more than forty years of practice and research, Dr. Brazelton has identified predictable stages at which children fall apart as they prepare to take a spurt in development. These times of disorganization are hard on families who are not prepared for them. Having this book as a guide through the early years may help manage challenges during this time.



LET'S TALK

In the next couple of months, your baby will babble in “words” with a consonant and a vowel (“da”, “ba”, “ma”). He will also make noises with the saliva in his mouth and try to imitate sounds you make. He will delight in conversations you share with the sounds he makes, and your response to him will encourage him to experiment more with his voice.

Your baby understands simple words you speak to him, especially if he hears them over and over. That's why it's a good idea to “talk through tasks” with him, describing with words the events in his life. (“Let's put your hand through your sleeve. There. Isn't that a warm sleeper?”) Some parents report that they feel a little silly with these one-sided conversations, but the truth is babies are listening and learning meanings to words for many months before they can respond in conversation.

BABY'S BODY

You can probably tell by the activity you see in your baby that he is gearing up to become mobile. He is starting to get around a little, whether by rolling, scooting or crawling. He can probably roll over. You may have seen him rocking on his hands and knees for a short time. Very soon, he will be able to sit



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alone. (Remember, though: His sitting will be “wobbly”. Don’t leave him sitting alone.) Your baby has become more adept at handling objects. He will soon be able to pass objects from one hand to another, which is an important task. At six months of age, some babies have already begun to show a hand preference, favoring one hand over the other.

MEAL TIME

Sitting in a high chair is a new experience for most six-month-olds. You have probably started gradually introducing some solid foods. You will soon find that your baby’s favorite foods will be ones that he can feed himself. Finger foods will be your child’s favorites once he has mastered the pincer grasp. By using his thumb and opposing finger, your child will discover independent feeding and he will revel in it. He will also enjoy exploring a spoon and a cup, but the food itself is probably of less interest than the tools used for feeding. Frustrated parents have to accept that exploration is more important than food at this age, and trust that their baby really will get enough nutrition.

SO-O-O SMART

The most interesting aspect of the six-month-old’s development is amazing mental growth. Two important concepts, object permanence and cause-and-effect, begin to emerge. Did you ever wonder why babies get such a kick out of playing peek-a-boo? It is because they don’t realize that an object still exists when they cannot see it. When you hide your face, a very young baby doesn’t know you are still there. But an older baby who understands object permanence (“An object still exists even though I can’t see it”) will laugh hilariously during peek-a-boo, celebrating the fact that he is “in on the joke”. To find out whether or not your baby has learned this skill, let him watch you put a toy under a blanket. If he lifts the blanket to uncover the toy, you can bet he is learning object permanence. Babies love to play games of this sort.

Learning cause and effect is a big step on the road to feeling a sense of control over the environment. Your baby is in the process of discovering that he can do something on purpose to make something else happen. This understanding that he can exercise some control on his surroundings will lead to the development of self-esteem. Your baby is empowering himself to become a capable person!

You can observe this growth of his notion of cause and effect in many ways. When sitting in a high chair, he may drop a spoon over the side and then look to see where it has gone. He listens for the sound it makes as it hits the floor. He watches to see if an adult will come and pick it up. He is delighted by all the things he was able to cause to happen by his action dropping the spoon. Babies love the sound they can make banging objects together. Again, that gratifying sound is the result of their actions, something they can cause to happen.

At this age, your baby may begin to use crying as a way to make something happen. He has learned that crying is a way to bring a loving adult to him. Since he must still depend on you for most things, he may use this crying to bring you to him even when he is not in any real distress. By now, you have learned your baby’s different cries and can probably tell when he is crying because he is bored and wants you to change his environment or to entertain him!

A BOARD BOOK: THE PERFECT TOY

A six-month-old loves to manipulate objects with his hands. He loves to hear and learn new words. He can remember that something exists even when he can’t see it and he has learned that he can make things happen. For all of these reasons, a board book is the perfect toy for the six-month-old child.

The stiff pages of a board book are easy for little hands to turn. Your baby will love to have you talk to him about the pictures on the pages. Even when the book is closed, he can remember the images on the pages inside. He can predict that if he opens the book, he will see the image he is expecting. What a wonderful feeling of success when he can make that happen! Board books enable babies to give themselves a successful first experience with books. We know many babies who’ve become so attached to a particular board book that they have insisted on taking them to bed with them (hard corners and all) and dragging them everywhere.

The parent’s role with board books is to introduce the book, talk about the pages and then serve as a “consultant” to talk again about a page or read the text when the baby or toddler brings the book to you. He may actually sit and listen while you read the whole book or he may be interested only in one page. It doesn’t really matter at this point. Soon enough, he will want to hear the whole book! Most of the “reading” will be done by your baby alone as he plays with the book, opens the pages, gazes at the illustrations, chews on the corners and carries the book along.

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Your nine-month-old baby has changed a lot in the last three months! He is more curious, more capable and more interesting by the day. He is now in a stage of very rapid development. Photograph him often and make frequent notes about the interesting and funny things he does.

By nine months, babies are desperately in love with their parents. After accomplishing a new skill, your baby will look at you and break into a smile. Your response to him is treasured at these moments. Unfortunately, this growing attachment between the two of you may make separations difficult. As he becomes mobile and moves around more, he may find himself separated from you. This can be frightening and can lead to him being more “clingy” than usual.

On those occasions when you must be away from your baby, be sure to prepare him. When you return, let him know that you are back. At this time, he is becoming more independent and moving away through increased physical skill and, yet, is realizing how dependent he is on you! This conflict represents an important struggle for every baby.

ON THE MOVE

Your baby has probably discovered a favorite way to move around, whether by crawling, scooting or creeping. At last he can get to those many objects he could only look at before! He is learning to pull himself up to the furniture where he will enjoy standing for increasing periods of time. At first, he will cry in frustration when he is ready to get down and will probably take a few falls. Soon, he will learn to fold his body in the middle and let himself down with a plop. Next, you will find him “cruising” along the furniture. He will be driven to these activities until he reaches his ultimate goal of walking.

Parents worry about the inevitable bumps a child will take as he learns to move around. But there is so much to be learned in playing freely on the floor! Your baby will benefit greatly from these opportunities for exploration. From rolling, crawling



and tumbling around, he is learning about his body and what it can do. He is learning how to get out from under furniture and how rugs feel different from wood floors. He is learning to climb by leaning up onto tables and stairs. He is learning hard and soft, hot and cold, smooth and rough—many concepts he will use for his whole life. To deny him these important experiences may actually decrease his very ability to learn.

When your baby stops moving long enough to explore small objects or toys, he can get himself to a sitting position. He may enjoy playing with containers filled with small objects such as blocks or spools. He will delight in dumping them out and putting them back again. He may bang two blocks together in front of him, bringing both hands to the mid-line of his body. Toys with moving parts will begin to fascinate him and he may push a car on the floor to make the wheels turn. He may spend time “examining” such moving parts. In their endeavor to learn as much as possible, nine-month-olds spend about 20% of their waking time simply staring at objects!

GIVING LIMITS, KEEPING HIM SAFE

Your child’s increasing curiosity and ability, while exciting for both of you, may pose safety risks. This is the time that you will need to make a serious effort for setting limits for him



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and making his environment safe for his exploration. Your child is becoming aware that certain actions may be forbidden.

He may crawl over to the TV, pull up and reach for the knobs. Before he reaches the knob, he may look around to be sure you're watching. He is asking you to set a limit! He needs your help to learn what behavior is acceptable and what is not. He is waiting for you to say "Don't touch!" and move him gently away. It's a long road. You must be consistent, firm and loving! At this age, it is helpful to create an environment which will be safe for your baby to explore. For the time being, you may want to remove as many temptations as possible. Your baby doesn't understand how much you love your grandmother's crystal vase. Let him learn "Don't touch!" on objects which are less valuable to you.



The baby-proofing of your house that you did a few months ago may need to be extended now that your child will be getting around more. You must continue to keep small objects off the floor. Household cleaners, chemicals and medicines should be out of reach.

Stairwells should be closed off by sturdy gates. And remember to watch for water hazards: Never leave baby in a bathtub or buckets of water unattended.

Although playpens are wonderful safety devices for brief times when you are unable to play with your baby, avoid using them for long periods. Freedom to move is essential for your baby's mental and motor development. Finding the right balance between nurturing your baby's curiosity and protecting his safety is one of the greatest demands of this time.

GROWING WITH LANGUAGE

Throughout the years of your child's life, you can find great pleasure in sharing language together. Jokes, riddles and rhymes will provide opportunities for you to laugh together. Conversations between you and your baby will enable you to answer your child's questions about the world and give you a glimpse of his thoughts. Communication between parents and children can be the "glue" that holds them together through difficult periods. Establishing a pattern of communication begins in infancy,

through conversation, through reading books and through language play.

Although it is often difficult to pinpoint a baby's first word, most babies will speak a word with meaning sometime between nine and fifteen months. The age of a baby's first word is not related to his intelligence or even necessarily his eventual language ability, so don't be concerned if your baby doesn't speak for a while. He will almost certainly be trying out many new sounds ("ga-ga," "ba-ba," "bye-bye"), but they may not yet have meaning. He will practice and explore these sounds when he is alone in his crib and in his "conversations" with you. You may hear him imitate the rise and drop of your voice and even the actions you make with your hands.

It is important to remember that he understands far more than he can say! He is learning a great deal by what you say to him, so keep talking. Research has shown that babies "babble" more often when their parents respond to the noises they make. Your conversations with your baby will encourage his speech and, more importantly, add to his understanding of the world.

FINGERPLAYS

By now you have probably enjoyed this traditional game with your baby. One of the reasons fingerplays are popular with nine-month-olds is because it gives them a chance to practice a newly-accomplished feat: the bringing of both hands together to the body's midline.

Fingerplays, a combination of bouncy rhymes, body movements and simple hand gestures, will be enjoyed greatly by your child in the months and years to come.

As you introduce fingerplays, choose one at a time to share with your baby. Begin by chanting or singing the rhyme out loud as you take your baby's hands in yours to do the gestures. After repeating the rhyme several times over a period of days, you will notice your baby beginning to move his hands or squirm in anticipation of the fingerplay.

There are many published collections of fingerplays available. Most either give written instructions or pictorial illustrations for how to move your hands as you say the rhyme.

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Dear Parents,

Happy Birthday to Baby and you! This month as your little one turns “1” you are undoubtedly reflecting on the dramatic changes you have seen in him over the past year. Your love affair with each other has grown as you have watched him progress from a tiny newborn to a capable toddler. In addition to his learning many new skills, he has gone from being very dependent on you to seeking more independence. This struggle between his need for you and wanting to “strike out on his own” is an important issue for every twelve-month-old.

You can often see this struggle in your child as he is exploring. He may crawl or walk a short distance, turn around and look for you and then return to you. He feels “driven” to try to walk, and yet his very progress takes him away from the one he loves. He enjoys his earliest steps most when you are there to congratulate him on his success.

A few babies are walking already, but most are still crawling and taking a few steps holding on to furniture on their first birthdays. Try to avoid comparing your baby’s progress with other babies! Babies learn to walk at different ages; the age of walking is not a predictor of cognitive ability. If you are concerned that your baby seems behind in this or any other skill, discuss this with your baby’s doctor. Remember that whatever your baby can accomplish will bring him pride and should bring a pleased response from you.

There is a close connection between motor development and your baby’s emotions. The struggle of learning to walk often expresses itself through the beginning of temper tantrums. Tantrums are a part of your baby’s sorting out his independence. He wants to make his own decisions, yet he needs you. Tantrums are often a healthy part of growth toward independence.

The toddler and preschool years ahead will be full of challenges and rewards with your developing child. A wonderful resource for parents is [Watch Me Grow: I’m One-Two-Three: A Parent’s Essential Guide to](#)



[the Extraordinary Toddler to Preschool Years](#) by Maureen O’Brien, Quill, 2002.

SETTING LIMITS

Your baby is combining new skills to explore his world, including the basement steps, the medicine cabinet, the top of the kitchen table and the houseplants. He needs you to help him understand safe limits. These five practices may help you teach your baby about limits which may protect him and help him gain more self control.

Prevent. You can often prevent dangerous or forbidden situations. Move the crystal vase to a higher shelf and put a gate at the stairwell. Create a trouble-free environment when possible.

Ignore. Ignore behavior that is annoying but not harmful. If he drags all the pots and pans out of the kitchen cabinet, you may want to take a deep breath and ignore it. If you pay too much attention, it may teach him to do this again to gain attention. Choose your “battles” carefully. Save discipline for important things, so that it will be more meaningful when you do use it.

Distract or redirect. Young children can often be distracted from one activity to another without your having to make an issue of it. If he has your keys



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and you need them, try offering another toy or activity. Your baby will probably let go of the keys and move on to the new toy. It's easier to get a baby interested in something else than to convince him to stop what he's doing.

Reward. Reward your baby with loving attention when he plays nicely. Notice the good behaviors, and reward them with a smile, a laugh or a hug. Your attention is your child's most precious reward; use it to encourage good behavior.

Freedom within limits. Your baby must have freedom to explore, safely. Babies kept in playpens or high chairs all the time may be safe, but are missing important opportunities to learn and develop. Providing freedom within safe limits may be the biggest challenge for parents of twelve-month-olds. It requires good judgment and constant effort.

Your baby will soon probably explore limits in other ways, too: biting, hitting and scratching other people. These behaviors are unpleasant, but expected. Remember that babies (like parents) learn most from their mistakes. It is important to break the cycle of bad behavior with a time out, or a time on your lap in the rocking chair. Help your child learn from his mistakes, and then let him start over. Keep calm! Anger really doesn't help misbehaving toddlers to learn better behavior.

PLAYTIME

Playtime is a learning time for your baby. Imitation games such as "Peek-a-Boo," "So Big" and "Pat-a-Cake" give him an opportunity to practice many new skills and usually result in squeals of laughter. Babies at this age love an audience and will be pleased to perform "Pat-a-Cake" or wave "Bye-Bye" to you. Don't count on them to perform for "outsiders", though, unless they initiate that themselves! "Peek-a-Boo" continues to give your baby practice in learning object permanence. When you are out of sight, he may make a noise or try out a forbidden task in order for you to respond by coming to him.

Your baby is becoming more and more curious about how things work. He may spend a great deal of time dropping objects into a container, dumping them out and putting them back in again. He may

be fascinated with figuring out how a plastic lid fits on a container, or how a wind-up toy works. Household items make wonderful toys! Pots and pans are not only fun to bang like a drum, but also make a great nesting toy!

LET'S TALK

For the last twelve months, your conversations with your little one have been slightly "one-sided". While you have communicated with your baby in many ways, most of his communication with you has been non-verbal. You have probably enjoyed hearing him explore speech sounds, babbling and cooing for the sheer pleasure of playing with his voice. Now comes your reward for all the months of talking, singing, explaining, and chanting nursery rhymes. Very soon, your baby will begin to say real words like "Mama", "Dada", "ball", "baby" and "NO!"

At last, he will be able to communicate with you through speech. However, he will continue to use pointing and gesturing to let you know what he wants. It will still be some time before he can articulate his needs clearly through language. When he points to something he wants, say the word for him: "Do you want a drink now?" He is eager to learn to speak, and this is the best way to give him new words. You may be amazed at how much language he can understand. He can probably follow simple instructions from you, such as "Bring me your truck." His receptive language will be far more developed than his spoken language for most of his childhood.

READ TO ME!

Have you begun reading to your baby? At the age of twelve months, most babies are more interested in learning to walk than in sitting still. But they still love books, even if they mostly use them "on the go"! When your toddler is standing, holding on to the furniture or when he plops down for a few minutes on the floor, you can share a book with him. In short snatches of time, you can talk about an illustration or read a few pages of text. Never force an active toddler to "sit still" to listen to books. Just keep presenting books in a positive, loving way. Eventually, his curiosity will get the better of him and he will want to hear more and more of the story!

MOM and Baby

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Dear Parents,

When you watch the incredible activity level of your fifteen-month-old, it may seem impossible to you that he was so recently a helpless infant! Sometime early in his second year, he has become a toddler, and his life is now a whirlwind of activity. His curiosity and success at walking keep him in perpetual motion as he seeks to move, to learn and to establish his independence.

Your toddler's capabilities for exploration will undoubtedly begin to take him beyond the bounds of safety. Some of his behaviors will be his way of asking you to set limits. He may ask for limits in a variety of ways.

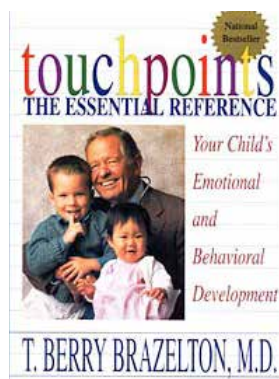
Your child may reach for something forbidden but first look back to make sure you are watching. This is a clear signal for you to step in and say, "Stop!"

When your toddler is tired or stressed, he may need you to help him set a limit on his activity. When you are on the phone, going to the grocery store or otherwise preoccupied, he may build up to an out-of-control state. On these occasions, he may need for you to step in and set a limit for him.

He may ask for limits by behavior which explores the question, "Who is in control here?" Every toddler needs the assurance that somebody bigger is in control. As much as he enjoys gaining independence, his safety and security depend on him knowing that you love him enough to provide limits for him. He needs to practice his independence, but not by crossing the street or climbing up to the medicine cabinet. Choose when to let him have control, and when to require him to accept limits.

In his book Touchpoints, Dr. T. Berry Brazelton states, "Next to love, a sense of discipline is a parent's second most important gift to a child."

~T. Berry Brazelton M.D.
Touchpoints



Many issues, such as your child's need for limits, will bring changes in your role as parent. As your child develops, you will find that parenthood places different demands on you. For a further discussion on the relationship between parents and their toddlers, you may enjoy reading Toddlers and Parents by Dr. Brazelton, Delta 1989.

TEMPER TANTRUMS

Toddlers experience inner conflict between their desire for independence and their dependence on others for help, safety and limits. When they experience this inner conflict, they lack the emotional maturity to deal well with it. The normal result of this conflict may be a temper tantrum.

Tantrums may be noisy and even alarming for parents. It is difficult to sit idly by while your child screams, pounds the floor and holds his breath! But the reality is this: Only your child can learn to control and contain this inner turmoil! If tantrums are a problem with your child, here are a couple of steps to try:

Take time out. Pick up your toddler and hold him quietly or put him somewhere safe.

Walk away. Walk out of sight until the tantrum lessens or has ended.



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When the tantrum is over, your toddler will need reassurance and comfort about this inner turmoil he is learning to control. You may want to comfort him by saying, "It's terrible being so upset, isn't it? I love you." At this point, let the tantrum be over. Don't talk about it anymore. Let him have a fresh start by moving on to some new activity.

SOOOOO BUSY

Your toddler spends much time being "busy". Once walking is underway, he will be moving on to climbing and running. Of course, he will explore any stairs he can, so only allow him to practice climbing when you are there to watch.

He will also be busy "helping" you around the house. Parents are still his favorite playmates and he will enjoy pretending to do the same activities as you: talking on the telephone, folding laundry, reading the newspaper. Let him "help" you as much as possible: When you are cooking, give him a small pan and a spoon so that he can "cook", too!

He will enjoy repetitive play: building with blocks and knocking them down so he can build again, and filling a container to pour it out. Toddlers love these activities and are learning important concepts through this kind of play. Bathtime is about more than getting clean for toddlers. It can provide a wonderful opportunity to play if you provide a few small containers to be filled and emptied.

COMMUNICATION

Your toddler is probably trying to communicate with you more all the time. He may understand many words that you say to him now and can probably say a few words for the objects and people in his life. Certainly, he will soon be using the word "NO!" You may begin to notice frustration in your toddler when he is not able to get his message across to you. You may be better able to understand his meaning by "listening" to his body language and considering his situation.

Children gain confidence and happiness when they learn enough language to be able to express themselves with words. You will see enormous growth in your child's ability to use words in the

next two years. He will be adding to his vocabulary every day, and you will be his greatest resource for this learning.

In addition to your conversations with him, he will learn a great deal through your reading to him. Books may become an important part of your toddler's life as his interest grows in using language. He may toddle over to you with the same favorite book for you to read each time you sit down. He may enjoy cuddling with you as you share favorite books. Remember that his attention span may be very short at this stage, so that he may only be interested in a few pages before he is ready to toddle off again.

Read as much as your toddler wants to hear. Never force a busy toddler to sit and read a book! Keep offering books in a positive way. Your toddler is likely to be hooked on books soon!

YOUR CHILD'S SELF-ESTEEM

Through his first year, your child grew in his understanding of who he is. Each time you held him in your arms, looked him in the eye and called him by name, you were giving him the message that he was valuable. He was beginning to develop esteem for himself, which led to his feeling esteem for you, and eventually for others in his life as well. As an active toddler, there will be times when he will displease you by his sometimes "challenging" behavior. This is a time when he is looking to you to set limits. But it will be important for you to continue to let him know that you think he is wonderful, even on days when his behavior is problematic.

How can you help your child to grow in self-esteem?

- **Really listen** when he tries to talk to you.
- Give your child some of your **undivided attention** each day.
- Tell your child you think he's **great**.
- "Catch him in the act" of being **good**.
- When he misbehaves, tell him you don't like **the behavior**, but don't tell him he's a bad child.
- Remember: You can never "spoil" a child with **hugs, kisses and smiles!**

MOM and Baby

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Dear Parents,

Living with an eighteen-month-old child certainly has its ups and downs! He is sometimes happy, cooperative and loving, and other times frustrated and negative. He runs at random (some say these tots “Think with their feet!”), continually investigating everything he contacts. He is capable of doing so much more than he could have a few months ago, but becomes easily frustrated because he cannot always count on his body to do what he wants it to do.

By eighteen months, your child probably has developed a real passion for his independence. He has by now developed a pretty good sense of who he is, which demonstrates itself positively in his pride in accomplishments and negatively in his possessiveness of his toys and other personal belongings. He desperately wants to do things his own way. He wants to decide what he eats, how long he plays outside and when he goes to bed. At the same time, he searches for limits because he knows he is not yet able to control himself. Becoming his own person is a long and very important growth process. The end result will be a competent, self-controlled, successful human being. When you become frustrated with him, try to remember that toddlers, like their parents, learn most from their mistakes!

You may have noticed that your child wants to make many of his own decisions, and yet is overwhelmed if his choices are not somewhat limited. For eighteen-month-olds, it is usually a mistake to say, “Wear this shirt.” He will balk at his lack of choice. Similarly, he may be overwhelmed if you ask, “What do you want to wear?” (And you may not approve his choice!) A better approach is to ask, “Do you want to wear this striped shirt or this red sweatshirt today?” With limited choices, he will feel capable to meet the challenge and will enjoy being the decision maker. Children who get lots of practice at making little decisions in the early years will be more confident at making big decisions in the years to come.

NO! NO! NO!

Both you and your child are probably saying “No!” at this stage. You must say “No” to protect him from



activities which threaten his safety. “No” has possibly become his favorite word. It may be his answer to most of your requests, and may be accompanied by a vigorous shaking of his head from side to side. Of course, you know that it is his way of exerting his independence and will, and yet it is natural for you to look forward to the day when he is not driven to be negative!

Temper tantrums are part of your toddler’s growth toward independence. A tantrum is a symptom of your toddler’s inner turmoil and is often his way of expressing that he has had enough and is simply overwhelmed. Tantrums can sometimes be averted by a watchful parent who can see this inner turmoil mounting and can divert a toddler’s attention. Once a tantrum begins, however, only your child can control it. You can help most by taking time out (pick up your toddler and hold him quietly or put him somewhere safe) or walking away (walk out of sight until the tantrum is over). When the tantrum is over, reassure your child that you love him. One of the blessings of the toddler’s short attention span is that he can go from tears to laughter in a matter of moments! Temper tantrums are one way that young children demonstrate the powerful emotions they experience. For a thoughtful discussion on this topic, you might be interested in Dr. Alicia Lieberman’s book, The Emotional Life of the Toddler, Simon & Schuster 1993.

PARENT'S PAL

It's a paradox: Even though your child is struggling to become his own person with an identity separate from you, he is still fiercely in love with you. He loves his parents "best of all" and continues to want to be near you whenever he can. You may notice that he is modeling his behavior after yours. At this age, toddlers begin to seriously imitate their parents in posture, in attitude and in activities. "Helping" with household chores is a favorite game for him. Letting him "work" alongside of you will make him feel good about himself and also enable you to supervise his play. Of course, he won't set the table as well as you do, but he will take pride in his effort and become more proficient in time!

Even more importantly, being involved with these everyday activities is the single best way for toddlers to learn about their world. Folding the laundry, setting the table, taking out the garbage and picking up the toys are activities toddlers and parents can do together. To a curious toddler, these activities are refreshing, new and fascinating. What better way to learn about colors, textures, sorting and classification than by folding laundry? And when a parent is willing to talk through tasks (use words to describe what is going on), what better way to learn new words?

Parents are often concerned that they should be "teaching" their toddlers. Yet, the most important "learning" for any toddler is the pleasure of enjoying everyday experiences with a loving adult who is willing to share those experiences patiently. Toddlers are being bombarded with sights, sounds, smells, tastes and touches on a daily basis. When adults talk to them about these sensations in their world, children begin to lay down the "connections" in their brains for processing this information. Therefore, the most important brain development comes not from flashcards and teaching drills, but from a growing understanding of how the world works.

PLAYTIME: LET'S PRETEND

One of the great pleasures of this age is that your child is able to pretend. He likes to pretend that a block is a car, pushing it along an imaginary road. He has imaginary conversations on the telephone, and loves nothing more than a "tea party" with you, especially if he gets to do the pouring. The development of the abstract thinking skills necessary for him to pretend is an amazing accomplishment for a young child. You should feel very proud when you

see your child make this important "leap" to symbolic play.

Play is your toddler's most powerful way of learning. He will use play to test all of his new thinking skills. He not only enjoys imitating you, but now also learns by imitating other children. This is a great age to introduce your child to one or two playmates. Your toddler may not cooperate in play with another toddler, but he will play alongside another child and imitate behaviors. Remember that toddlers playing together need constant supervision. A toddler is not ready to share his belongings. He is still very busy with the task of becoming his own person!

FAVORITE PLAY ACTIVITIES

Most eighteen-month-olds love balls, empty boxes, dolls and four-wheeled low riding toys. They love to play with pots and pans, blocks, playdough and simple puzzles. They usually enjoy bathtime and the water play that it allows: pouring, dumping and squeezing sponges. Most toddlers like scribbling with large crayons and wadding up and tearing paper. Almost every eighteen-month-old delights in taking things apart. Most of these activities result in making a mess. It is important to remember that your child makes these messes unintentionally, and not for the purpose of making your life harder! You may discover ways to limit the mess, perhaps by assisting him in putting away one set of playthings before getting out another. Once again, parent supervision can make a positive difference. A parent's presence during playtime also enables a toddler to seek assistance when he finds a task too difficult, and to seek approval when he has accomplished some new skill. Your smile or hug will let him know that you think his job of growing and learning is important.

LANGUAGE

You are probably seeing a real growth in your toddler's language ability. He understands simple questions and uses a few words meaningfully, even perhaps putting a couple of words together. You can enhance his language by "stretching" his talk. If he says "Drink," or "Want drink", you can respond by saying, "You want a drink of water." Although he may be frustrated at being unable to say what he means, his receptive language is much more developed. He can follow simple instructions. Be sure to get his attention before telling him to do something, by tapping him on the shoulder and looking him in the eyes. Be aware that sometimes eighteen-month-olds understand directions perfectly, but choose to ignore them anyway!

MOM and Baby

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Dear Parents,

As your twenty-one-month-old toddler approaches the last quarter of his second year, you take great pride in his many hard-won accomplishments. He is more capable and more verbal now, and you are getting a glimpse of the unique individual he is becoming. He is firmly attached to you, and has positive self esteem because of all that he has achieved in so short a time.

Unfortunately, there is a challenge ahead for you and your toddler in the months to come which may put your relationship and his self-esteem to the test: toilet training. Because the issue of toilet training is such a difficult one for many children and parents, it can put a terrible strain on an entire family. It is sobering to note the frightening incidence of child abuse associated with toilet training accidents. Because of the risk to a growing child's self-esteem and to the parent-child relationship that toilet training often brings, it is a subject of serious concern to us at Baby TALK. For that reason, this newsletter will be entirely devoted to this topic.

You may be thinking, "But I hadn't even considered toilet training my child yet!" Wonderful! We hope to get this information to you before you have even begun the process. Statistically, most parents begin to train their children at about the age of two years. Most children are actually trained by the age of three years. Some children are trained before the age of two, and some are four or older when they are actually trained. Obviously, parents seem to be in a bigger hurry about this achievement than children.

Parents face many pressures to get their children trained early. The cost of disposable diapers and the trouble of cloth diapers are a real burden to many families. Many preschools and daycare centers exclude children in diapers. Some fastidious parents are anxious to teach their children to be clean and dry. Grandparents may be pressuring you to train early. And there is always an unspoken sense of competition with other toddlers who are trained earlier than your own.



While, you don't intend to push your child, it is difficult to resist these pressures. But the one cardinal rule for knowing when the time is right to train your baby is this: It is absolutely critical to leave it up to the child. Very soon, your child will decide when he is ready. At that time, you and he can both experience great joy and satisfaction over this astounding feat of self discipline.

HOW WILL I KNOW WHEN TO START?

In his book Touchpoints, Addison-Wesley 1992, Dr. T. Berry Brazelton describes developmental steps which signal readiness for toilet training:

- He'll be over the excitement of walking and will be ready to sit down.
- He will be ready to understand such words and concepts as "This is your potty seat. Mine is the big one. Someday you'll go on yours like I do on mine."

There is a period at about two years of age when children want to imitate. A boy walks like his father, a girl like her mother. Subtly, they are identifying with the important adults around them. They want to wear your clothes. They are absorbing gestures like adults around them. Imitation can be used to capture toilet behavior.

At two years of age, most children begin to put things where they



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belong. They have a concept of orderliness and of where parents put things. This urge to put things away like parents do, can be transferred to urine and bowel movements.

Negativism comes and goes at around two. Before that, it is always near the surface. To start when he's negative would mean failure, for sure.

All of these developmental mechanisms can be captured to help a child conform to society's demands that he be clean and dry all day and all night. Specifically, a child will begin to indicate readiness for toilet training by showing more awareness of his bodily functions. Does he grunt and pull at his diaper when he is filling it? Does he go to a specific place, or even "hide" when he is having a bowel movement? If your child shows signs that he is aware of his need to eliminate before he actually does it, you should consider two other issues: Is he in a relatively tranquil period without too much negativism? And can he follow two or more commands (Go to the kitchen, find the ball and bring it to me.)? If the answer to both questions is yes, then he will have the emotional stability and necessary language and thinking skills to empower him for toilet training.

Some parents may wonder if toilet training is worth the effort, thinking that it might be better to let the child train himself. Unfortunately, your child needs you to let him know what is expected of him. Parents need to show him the way, even though the decision to cooperate must be his own.

HOW SHOULD I TOILET TRAIN MY TODDLER?

There is no one "right" method for teaching toilet training, but there is a "right" attitude: one of patience, gentleness, acceptance and respect for each child's right to make decisions regarding his own body. It is a mistake for parents to take "ownership" of the process. It is your child's job to learn to control his bladder and bowels. And when your child has accidents (as he most certainly will), it is your job to help him forgive himself and go on.

If you are looking for a "method" for training, here is the one that Dr. Brazelton advises to the families in his practice:

First Give him his own potty chair. It should be his to drag around to learn with.

Second After a week or so, take him to sit on his potty chair in his clothes while you sit on yours. Read to him or give him a cookie to get him to sit there momentarily. This is just to get in the routine of sitting on the chair.

Third The next week, ask him if it's all right to take off his diaper while he sits on the chair once a day. Reiterate, "This is what Mommy (or Daddy or whoever) does every day. We go to the potty when we're big like you!"

Fourth The third week, take him to the potty with his dirty diaper to undo it and then drop it in. Say, "Someday, this is where you will go to do your potty. This is what Mommy and Daddy do everyday. This is your potty and this is mine." Don't flush it away in your toilet while he watches. Some children worry about where it goes!

Fifth The next step is at the toddler's discretion. If he resists, come back to it later. If he is still interested, you can offer to take off his clothes and let him run around with a bare bottom. Offer to put his potty where he is playing. He can go to it himself if he wants to. Remind him every hour to try to go. He will very likely be able to produce something in one of his times on the potty. Leave it there a while for him to admire. Congratulate him, but don't overdo it. Remember, this is his achievement, not yours.

Sixth If he is really ready, you can leave his pants off for longer and longer periods. If he has an accident on the floor or begins to resist, go back to diapers without making it seem a punishment. Say as little as possible about it. When he is ready to try again, let him try. You are counting on his desire to be "big."

Seventh In learning to urinate in the toilet, a boy should start out sitting down. Standing and "spraying" is too much fun. When he is trained, an older male (like Dad) can show him how to stand and urinate.

Eighth Right training shouldn't begin until he's dry after his nap and lets you know that he wants to stay dry at night. Wait until he's ready. Most children aren't able to stay dry at night until the age of three or even four or five.

MOM and Baby

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Dear Parents,

Deep thinking explorers, two-year-old children are ready to take on the world with confidence and ability! Asking questions, solving problems, expressing their needs – these toddlers have gained many tools to use in their ventures. Although he may still be struggling with issues of independence and negativism, your two-year-old is probably often giggly and affectionate. He needs you and he enjoys you, and you certainly enjoy him.

Your relationship with your toddler continues to be the single most important contributor to his own self-esteem. He enjoys his conversations with you and especially when you bend down to his level and look him in the eye when he has something exciting to share with you. Your kindness and interest in him tell him that he is loved and reassured. Likewise, when you have something important to tell him, remember to speak to him at eye level.

PLAYTIME

Your two-year-old enjoys large motor play like running, climbing, walking up stairs, jumping and learning to navigate riding toys. He uses small muscles to play with blocks, puzzles and scribbling. You can observe him at play as he thinks through a problem to discover a solution.

Parents and toddlers are eager to introduce their child to playmates. Playmates provide important learning opportunities, but parents must remember that two-year-olds are still mostly interested in themselves. They are not apt to share their toys. You should talk with your child about sharing before friends arrive and give him the opportunity to put away any toys which he does not want to share. When he is with playmates, you will notice that they still spend most of their time in parallel play, playing near each other and imitating each other, but not really interacting much.

Inevitably, when toddlers play together, one will become aggressive in play. This is an opportunity to talk about how people don't like to be pushed or have toys taken away! Your child will need you



to stop him and help him learn to control himself. Tell him that he will have to be removed from his friends if he treats them this way, and then follow through if he does. Afterwards, talk about the important job he must learn to do: control himself.

Learning to interact socially is a challenge for toddlers. Their failure to do so doesn't mean they are "bad", but rather that they are learning. And toddlers, like their parents, learn most from their mistakes.

LANGUAGE

Your child has probably started using simple sentences as he expresses himself to you. Most two-year-olds speak in two or three-word sentences or phrases, like "Go to store" or "Pretty dress". Most twos are beginning to ask a lot of questions about their world. The word "why?" is used almost as much as the word "no!". Your toddler can still understand much more language than he can express, and will continue to rely on gestures to help get his point across. Offer a gentle push by saying, "I think I know what you want, but I'd like you to say it to me. Is it a truck. . . or a house. . . or a ball?"

There is an enormous range of "normal" language ability at this age, as some toddlers use as few as a dozen words while, others talk all day long with a

vocabulary of several hundred words. Your toddler may stutter as his ideas come more quickly than his mouth can form the words. It's similar to falling over his feet when learning to walk. The less fuss made about this stuttering, the better. Don't pressure him by correcting him or finishing his sentences for him. Listen patiently, and give him time to get the words together. This stuttering is a very common occurrence throughout the preschool years and is almost always self-correcting.

WHAT ABOUT TV?

Most toddlers will not sit too long in front of a TV set. (Thank goodness!) It is understandably easy for a parent to become dependent on TV as a babysitter for a child. However, this habit can be unhealthy for several reasons. Time spent in front of a TV is time not spent on other activities your toddler needs for exercise and learning. Too much TV can encourage a child to become passive—a spectator of life rather than a participant! And although this may be difficult to understand, watching television can be exhausting for a toddler, requiring all of his senses and concentration to “tune in” and stay attentive. He may actually become out-of-control after watching TV for a long period of time. He has used a lot of energy, without the opportunity to dispense with the stress through physical activity. He may need some reassurance from you after a long watching period.

You may be aware that children model aggression and violence from TV watching. Fortunately, they can also gain positive behaviors from the judicious use of television. “Caillou” and “Sesame Street” are examples of age-appropriate TV shows for toddlers. Television will not harm your toddler if you use it within these guidelines from Dr. T. Berry Brazelton in his book, Touchpoints:

Choose programs carefully.

Toddlers should watch no more than one-half hour at a time. This can be done twice a day.

Watch TV with your toddler! Be prepared to talk about the program, and let your child talk about it with you.

LET'S DO IT AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN...

Have you noticed how much your toddler likes sameness and routines? He feels in control of his day when he knows what is coming next. He likes to be told what's going to happen next, and will probably

want you to go over his day with him again and again. He is crazy about any activity he can count on (going to the library on Fridays, having juice and a cracker after his nap) and may even drive you a little crazy with his insistence on always doing things the same way. What is going on here?

As your toddler has recognized what a complex world he lives in, he has come to learn how to manage it if it has an understandable structure. Any structure he can impose gives him a feeling of confidence and security. This need for structure is so great that he can even accept activities he would rather avoid (like bedtime) if they can be surrounded by a predictable routine which he can somehow control. A routine at bedtime or naptime (brush teeth, get a drink, read a story, sing a song, kiss Teddy, kiss Mom) can turn this event from a battleground into a loving episode. You may hear him in his bed talking to himself as he re-creates his day, going over all the activities in it. He is comforting himself to sleep by his replay of his daily routine.

Children's interest in being “Mother's” or “Father's Helper” is greater at the age of two than at any other time. Partly, this interest is the enjoyment of tasks which can always be done the same way: Setting the table, emptying the waste basket or rinsing a plastic dish. These chores are another example of comforting routines. A child who is able to contribute in this way to his family earns a great boost to his self-esteem from the knowledge that he is useful. Letting him help in this way takes time and energy now, but will pay off in years to come!

PLEASE READ IT AGAIN

As part of his desire to “keep everything the same”, your toddler will undoubtedly go through a time when he wants you to read him the same book over and over again. You may wonder why he is stuck on a particular book when he has many others to choose from. You may be tempted to hide this book so you won't have to read it again. You know he has it memorized, so there's no way you can skip any pages!

Congratulations! When your child has “connected” with a book in this way, you can be sure that he has discovered the special joy of books. Read it to him often, and keep enticing him with other books as well. He will soon move on to other books.

MOMM and Baby

A Baby Talk Newsletter brought to you by Little Company of Mary Hospital

Dear Parent,

What interesting characters two-and-a-half year-old children are! You have probably learned that living with your thirty-month-old is both a joy and a challenge. It is this age that spawned the term “terrible twos”, and yet children at this age are funny, sometimes cooperative and usually very loving. Determined to do things their own way, two-and-a-half-year-olds also have the belief that their parents are all-powerful and simply wonderful.

Truly, this is the age of contradictions. One minute your child may be confidently set on doing things for himself, and the next minute he won't even try, totally overwhelmed by the task. One day he loves green beans, and the next day he won't even touch them. If Daddy's dressing him, he wants Mommy. If Mommy's dressing him, he wants Daddy!

Your child is not unusual if making decisions is hard for him right now. This is the age at which decision-making is the most difficult. He may vacillate back and forth on even the simplest decisions and when he finally makes a choice, change his mind immediately.

You can often help with painful decisions by limiting his choices. Instead of asking, “What toy should we play with now?” you might ask, “Should we play ball or build with blocks?” He may even struggle with this narrow choice, but he needs practice in decision-making. On days when he seems overwhelmed by it all, you can just invite him to join a favorite activity with you, thereby skipping the decision altogether. But don't be surprised if he balks because it is not his idea!

Other factors contribute to the inner turmoil your child is feeling now. His mental development has surpassed both his physical development and his language development at this time. He is probably frustrated that he cannot make his body do or his mouth say all that his mind can conceive. Toilet training may be creating pressure for him. Even if he seems to have mastered training at this early age, he still feels tension at the task of keeping clean and dry. It may help you cope with his sometimes difficult



behavior, to realize that life is often difficult for him just now. In a few months, he will be a much more contented person as he gains confidence in decision making, moving and talking. It may also help to know that the age of three, which is coming up soon for your toddler, is often one of the most pleasurable stages of parenting. Remember: The challenges that face you now are mostly temporary!

TENSION RELIEF

With so much turmoil going on inside your little person, don't be surprised to see an increase of tension-relieving behaviors. Nail-biting, thumb-sucking, stuttering and temper tantrums are very common at this age, and may be providing a necessary outlet for your toddler's frustration. It may be best not to hassle children about these habits at this age, and it is definitely not the age to take away the “lovey” or security blanket. Later, your child will have fewer frustrations and more skills for coping with the ones he has. The tension of this age is exhausting for many children, who may exhibit signs of tiredness, such as whining or an increased need for rest. It is important that your toddler has plenty of sleep to cope with the demands of his life. Insist on an afternoon nap and an early bedtime. You will both benefit!

If your child bites his nails or sucks his thumb, don't make an issue of it just now. If he



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stutters, listen patiently and resist the urge to finish his sentences for him. And if he throws a temper tantrum, remember that the less you involve yourself in it, the sooner he will learn to control his temper himself. Simply walk away, and after it is over you can reassure him that you love him very much, but only he can learn to control his temper.

A fun aspect of this age is your child's developing sense of humor, which leads him to giggle over silly behavior, role playing, unexpected events and mispronounced words. You may also notice that he can sometimes play with other children now, not just near them. Aggression between toddlers remains a problem, however, so your supervision is needed.

RITUALS

Having begun to "sort out" his world, your toddler demands sameness in his environment. He likes having things done the same way in the same order. He wants things put always in the same appropriate place. It may upset him for Aunt Sue to sit in Daddy's chair.

He has such a desperate need for sameness and order at this age that your child may set up his own rituals. Rituals help him avoid having to make choices and give him a feeling of control. Rituals can be a help to parents, in that they can prepare a child for bedtime or make bath or dressing or meals easier ("We always sit down at the table when we eat".) But rituals can create problems, too. For example, if you need to put him to bed quickly and he needs three books read to him and twelve stuffed animals tucked in one by one! Generally, trying to "skip" parts of rituals saves little time and results in a disoriented, upset child.

BOOKS: A PLEASURABLE DELIGHT

When you and your toddler are on a collision course and things have just gone too wrong for him, you can often avert disaster by sitting down together and reading a book! Reading aloud together provides the single best transition activity we know about. When parents and children read together, a number of positive things happen naturally:

You sit close together. When your toddler is tense, he may resist a hug.

By the end of the story, his body will have relaxed and he may be leaning into you to receive the cuddling he needs for reassurance.

You both leave your frustrations behind. When you read a book, it requires that you leave behind the thoughts that filled your head moments before, in order to enter into the story. A book removes us from our present situation and takes us to a new place mentally.

You get a fresh start. The bad feelings are gone, and in their place is the shared experience you've just had together. You and your toddler are much more likely to be in harmony after sharing a story.

And of course, in addition to helping your toddler out of a "bad situation", books also help develop his imagination, his language skills and his ability to pay attention. And most importantly, books are just plain fun! You may be amazed at how much you, too, will enjoy the many wonderful children's books available at your library!

HOW CAN YOU LEARN ABOUT GOOD CHILDREN'S BOOKS?

You may be aware that there is an enormous treasury of wonderful books available for young children, but not aware of how to find out about them. The best way we know of is to visit the library and talk to a children's librarian. Children's librarians take special delight in finding a book that is just right for each child. If your child has enjoyed a particular book, tell the librarian about it and he may be able to recommend a similar one. Don't be afraid to let your child "browse" at the library. A book that you might not notice may have special appeal to him.

One book your child may enjoy is [Under the Chinaberry Tree. Books and Inspirations for Mindful Parenting.](#) by Ann Ruethling & Patti Pitcher. (Broadway Books, 2003.) This book combines a handbook on the joys of parenting with reviews of more than 200 of the best books for young children. You may also be interested in a publication of Baby TALK's, entitled [Read for Joy!](#) This book guides you through the stages of reading with your child, infancy to adolescence, and relates reading to the developmental needs of each stage. It may be checked out from the library or purchased directly from Baby TALK.

MOM and Baby

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Dear Parent,

Congratulations! Your child is three, the age many refer to as “the golden age of childhood”. With the negativism of the last eighteen months mostly behind him, your child is probably calmer, happier and easier to manage. He is more confident than ever before and mostly thinks his parents are wonderful, desiring to please them above all else. He feels good about his accomplishments and wants everyone to share in his enthusiasm. In his book *Touchpoints*, Dr. T. Berry Brazelton writes, “The one thing I’d like for all children to feel about themselves at this age is- I’m important! Everyone likes me!” Your child wants to know that you think he is the greatest three-year-old ever. With the absence of major developmental hurdles just now, this is an important opportunity to strengthen your child’s sense of self-esteem.

LET’S PLAY!

Physical play with your three-year-old is deliciously fun. He is more competent at running, jumping and climbing. He knows how to play on a slide and a swing. He enjoys throwing, catching and kicking a ball. His small motor skills have improved to the point that he is able to “write” with a pencil or crayon. He will enjoy experimenting with scissors. He may be able to draw a few simple shapes. Sand, clay and water play provide real enjoyment now, as does working with modeling clay or playdough.

Pretending is a new ability at this age. You may notice your child playing with blocks imaginatively along with other toys, such as building bridges for his trucks to drive over or building a house for his dolls to live in. Doll play increases in complexity as he role plays real people he knows, acting out all sorts of situations.

Another positive development for three-year-olds is their social ability. Playmates become more and more important to your child. Although they still enjoy individual play, play between children is far more cooperative now. Threes like having “friends”. They



show many emotions in play, making each other cry, laugh and get angry. They hug each other, learn from each other and look forward to seeing each other again. They are becoming aware that other people have feelings, too. And, much to the relief of their parents, three-year-olds are finally able to share. Sharing their possessions becomes somewhat less painful as they come to value people above objects. Three-year-olds are finally able to take the love and warmth they have received from you since birth and share it with others. They are ready to begin to nurture other people as they have been nurtured.

LITTLE MINDS AT WORK

One of the great advances seen in the three-year-old child is his understanding of the passage of time. Words designating time (“yesterday”, “soon”, “next week”) may be showing up in your child’s vocabulary, even if he uses them inappropriately (“I went to the store tomorrow.”). He will enjoy looking at a calendar as you explain upcoming events in his life, and marking off days as they pass.

In the same way, his cognitive growth enables him to have a better sense of space as he comes to understand and use



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words like “under” and “behind”. He may also begin to have a sense of numbers as he may accurately count two or more objects.

FEARS

One difficult aspect of all this mental growth is the appearance of fears. Your little one may begin to worry about sirens, barking dogs and monsters in the closet. He may become reluctant to go to strange places or try new adventures. These fears may be triggered by real events, they may be a part of your child's growing imagination, or they may be a way to work out aggressive feelings. What can you do about these fears?

Try to understand the cause of the fear. Has it been caused by a real event, or a change in your child's life? You may not always find a cause. Remember: Fears are a normal part of growing up.

Talk to your child about his feelings. Prepare him for the surge of fear he'll have when he hears a barking dog or enters a dark room.

Remember that reassurance will not always wipe away the fear. Try to help him find some control. Ask him what will help him be less afraid, and try it if possible.

Limit your child's TV watching. He is susceptible to scary images now. Watch TV with him and follow-up by talking with him. This discussion will assure him and give you a chance to share your values.

Realize that bedtime is a common source of fears: both going to bed and waking in the night. A bedtime routine will help your child handle the fears. A “lovey” (blanket or stuffed animal) and a night-light will go a long way with a three-year-old.

LANGUAGE

Just as two-year-olds acquire language, threes begin to really use it. Their improved language ability makes parenting easier, as they can sometimes even be talked into doing something they don't want to do if you can give them a compelling reason. When your three-year-old misbehaves, a discussion will be an important part of your approach to discipline.

Your toddler has probably developed a wonderful sense of humor and enjoys listening to silly rhymes, perhaps even making up some of his own. He enjoys songs and fingerplays and wants them to be part of his day.

Threes love mystery words and the emphasis they give: “This day is special.” “Do you want to know a secret?” “When we get home there will be a surprise.”

You may even be able to change the course of a conversation with a mystery word and some quick thinking! Your undivided attention in conversations with your child will enable him to share with you his accomplishments and discoveries. He will appreciate your listening ears and attentive eyes as he shares his questions and “stories”. Three-year-olds become great conversationalists, almost as interested in what others are saying as in what they say themselves. Language, at last, becomes reciprocal!

Observing these wonderful new language skills, you may be tempted to push your child in reading and writing. Resist the temptation to push him too early. At this time, play is his way of learning. A child learns best who learns for himself. Although young children can learn to read (they will do anything to please their parents!) it tends to cost them something later. Watch for your child's own desire to learn numbers and letters and be sure the desire is coming from him and not in order to please you!

In the meantime, reading to him, talking to him, listening to him and giving him unlimited opportunities for play and exploration will prepare him well for the complex process of learning to read.

STUTTERING

Your three-year-old may experience episodes of stuttering as he is able to think faster than he can form the words to express himself. Stuttering provides him with a little time to pull his words together and is only rarely a cause for concern at this age. Give him your full attention when he speaks and resist the urge to tell him to “slow down” or finish his sentence for him. As in so much of parenting, patience seems to be the key!

LET'S READ

Three-year-olds love books more and more, and their taste for books is expanding. They are able to appreciate busier, more complicated illustrations. They enjoy guessing and riddle books, and alphabet and number books begin to be of interest to them. Most three-year-olds have a few much-loved books they want to read again and again.