



School Begins at Birth Series

Year One, Month One

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Dear Parents

Are you ready for a first month of parenthood? Soon your baby will be one month old!

At last you are at home with your newborn. The relatives, neighbors and friends have come and gone. They have told you what you already know, your baby has the biggest eyes, roundest head, daintiest hands, and perfectly formed feet. Your child is far more beautiful than all the others. Your infant is more alert, smarter and better natured than any other child, ever!

You are about to settle back and peacefully enjoy this truly exceptional infant. You are confronted with a problem. This perfect infant is crying, kicking and angrily complaining. You ask yourself, "What do I do now?"

Perhaps you have a quiet, patient newborn who eats, sleeps and is awake at all the right times. However, as you begin to marvel over this creature you suddenly think "This child is so small, so fragile, so helpless. There is so much that can go wrong. Will I be able to do the right thing?"

You begin to wonder if you are going to get through the next few minutes, or even the next few hours. You want to know, "Do all newborns look this way? cry all night? stare into space? Why do they get hiccups, squirm and fuss?" This often happens when new parents are alone or awake with the baby in the middle of the night.

These thoughts run through your head. You are experiencing what most normal parents go through during their first few weeks with a newborn. You have a crazy schedule.

You sleep very little. Life centers around a small, delightful but demanding infant.

Often new parents have limited experience with newborns. If this is your first child, you may not know what a newborn can or cannot do. If your child does not quite match the stereotypes, do not worry.

If your newborn has a face that is red, blotchy and wrinkled and has a head that is large in comparison with the body, this is normal. Infants keep their eyes closed most of the time. You probably have a pretty normal looking infant. Your newborn is growing, changing and learning new things every day.

The School Begins at Birth newsletter series helps you discover and cope with the joys and pains of parenting. It will focus on your child's month-by-month development during the first year. It includes important facts about your child's health and nutrition. Do the suggested activities to stimulate your child to achieve maximum learning potential.

Remember that your baby is unique. Babies develop certain skills in about the same order. Your child's skills may appear more quickly or more gradually than others. Recognize and encourage these skills as they appear. Help your child grow and learn as much as possible. There will be moments in your child's life, times when your child is ready to learn something new. If you are aware of this development, you can stimulate that learning.

You are your child's first and best teacher. Remember that SCHOOL BEGINS AT BIRTH!

Mental Development

Infants use all of their senses to learn about their new world. Probably the most important of the senses in this early learning period is sight. The American Optometric Association suggests that 80 percent of what a young child learns comes through the sense of sight.

Infants live in a world of darkness for nine months. They are eager to use their eyes. It may take some adjusting to get used to the bright lights of the outside world. Do not worry. Infants cope by blinking, frowning or simply closing their eyes. Their vision is less sharp than their parents. Newborns can see things that are close to them. Your infant can see your face if your head is 7 to 15 inches away from your child's face.

Infants cannot handle abstract learning. Your newborn will not master the alphabet no matter what you do. However, your little one is constantly picking up and absorbing new information. Watch how your baby wants to learn.

Mental development starts at the very beginning. Your newborn is alert, responding to you. It makes a lot of sense to respond right back. It is fun, too.

Emotional Development

Your baby's first negative emotion probably will be fear. Infants fear sudden noises and falling. They will require many experiences to be able to distinguish between dangerous and



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safe activities. Fear and pain usually result in screaming, a natural response that will continue throughout life.

With a few experiences, loud noises will not bother them very much. Your child can learn to sleep through television and radio noise. Brothers and sisters screaming and playing nearby may not disturb the baby. Also, playing music may be a pleasant and soothing way to help your child relax.

Social Development

One of the first social skills your child will acquire is smiling. The first smiles are usually an automatic reflex action. Your positive response to those smiles encourages your child to develop smiling skills very quickly. Parents and friends are flattered when babies smile at them, so they smile right back. The baby smiles in return and it goes on and on.

Another early social skill is crying. This is your child's only verbal communication. The message may be difficult to understand at first. If you listen carefully you will hear four basically different cries.

- 1) **Boredom:** sometimes an infant just wants attention, holding, carrying, conversation and cuddling.
- 2) **Fatigue:** often children cry from exhaustion. They need some help to relax. Rock the baby.
- 3) **Hunger:** babies may cry because they are hungry. They need sucking gratification. Those few moments of nursing after they have had their fill of food meet this need.
- 4) **Pain:** physical discomfort may cause babies to cry. They may be too cold, too hot or something may be poking them or causing a gas pain.

Listening to your child's communication will help you provide the correct reaction to his or her needs.

Overall, try to respond more to the smiles rather than to the cries. This will set a pattern that can continue throughout the parenting years. Try to be alert to positive behavior and provide for needs communicated in a positive way.

Language Development

At this point in development, most of your child's vocabulary will consist of "oo" sounds. Another sound, somewhat like bubble blowing is best described as "booah."

Most babies also like the consonant "m" which later combines with "a" to form a pretty important word, "ma".

At first, small throaty noises are a rather limiting language. Do not worry. Your child will rapidly build upon these humble beginnings.

Muscle Development

Your child's grasping reflex may appear much earlier than expected. As you watch your child thrash about, flinging arms and legs everywhere, watch the tiny fingers open and close. The coordinated effort may not be as sophisticated as you may think. At this point, it is probably just a reflex action. You can test this reflex by putting any object between your child's thumb and forefinger. A wishbone rattle is a good toy for small-muscle development.

Your child, soon, will be reaching and grasping at the same time. This will be a very sophisticated action. Watch for the small preparatory steps.

The thrashing action of newborn infants is an important part of large-muscle development. Newborns seem to know when and how much exercise they need. They often exercise most when all of their clothes are off and when they are hungry. Encourage this type of exercise.

Special Message to Mothers

During the first few weeks after your baby is born it is not at all unusual for you to feel depressed at certain times. You may find yourself on the verge of tears, for no apparent reason. Mothers and fathers get the baby blues. This is the let down most of us feel after any long awaited moment has come and gone.

Physical changes within the mother's body may trigger feelings of depression. The mind and body are meshed. Any profound readjustment shows in feelings and thoughts. One factor is that those special hormones secreted during pregnancy are no longer needed. There is also the worn out feeling that follows any sudden change in schedule or routine like those 2 a.m. feedings. Finally, your supply of energy may not match the day and night demands of your newborn.

Probably the best way to deal with the baby blues is to be reassured that many parents have them and that they are temporary. To keep your days as simple as possible, ask nothing of yourself but the basic essentials. Let thank-you notes and birth announcements wait until you have the emotional strength and physical energy to cope with them. When you can, get out and away from your infant for a few hours. Indulge yourself with a new hairdo, lunch at your favorite restaurant or whatever makes you feel refreshed. Also, plan a nap for yourself around your baby's schedule. Try to be flexible. You will feel less worn out at the end of the day if you can be more relaxed during the day.

Somehow you must find some moments in the day for your spouse. Sometimes parents feel unconsciously threatened by this newcomer who upsets routines and schedules. Include your spouse in as many parenting activities as possible. Share the chores right from the beginning. It will reap dividends both for your child and your spouse.

Health Suggestions

What's Normal?

At first, your baby may appear to be all head. As your child grows the rest of his or her body will catch up.

Your baby's skin may be white, dark, pink or red and wrinkled. It also may be dry and peel. Rashes may come and go in the first few weeks. Sometimes hands and feet look a little blue the first few days.

Baby girls and boys may have swollen breasts.

Baby girls may have a bloody discharge from the vagina. The bleeding is caused by the mother's hormones but will go away.

If your baby boy was circumcised his penis will be red, swollen and tender for about a week. Apply petroleum jelly to his penis at each diaper change. If he was not circumcised, gently push back the foreskin and clean his penis during diaper changes and bathing.

Your baby probably will do a lot of sleeping, although not always when you would like. All babies are different and require different amounts of sleep. Your baby knows best. Most babies sleep through the night by the time they are three months old or when they weigh about 12 pounds. By that time they also may settle into a pattern of a morning or afternoon nap. Most babies sleep on their stomach with their head to the side. It is the safest way too.

Your baby's clamped umbilical cord usually dries up, gets dark and falls off in one to two weeks. Clean the cord and the area around it with a piece of cotton dipped in rubbing alcohol at each diaper change. Do not be afraid to lift up the cord and get the alcohol at the base. After it falls off, continue cleaning the area with alcohol if there is a little bleeding or scabbing.

Unless your doctor tells you differently, a room temperature that is comfortable for you will be fine for your baby, too. Getting out of the house also is good for both of you. When the weather permits, go for a walk. Try to avoid crowds of people for the first few weeks. Your baby has very sensitive skin. You will need to provide sun protection. Limit baby's time in the sun.

Bathing

Bath time can be a wonderful time or a disaster. Besides making your baby smell sweet and nice, bath time is an important part of keeping your baby healthy. Baths can be given whenever it suits your schedule. The diaper area and face get the most dirty, so they should be washed with a wet washcloth several times a day. Other than that, a bath three to four times a week is enough.

Tub or sponge bath, which is best? Give your baby a sponge bath instead of a tub bath until one week after the umbilical cord stump falls off. After that, use whichever method you and your baby like best.

Before you begin, you will need a towel to lay the baby on, a towel to dry the baby with, a washcloth and mild soap. Make sure the room is warm and wash your hands before the bath.

For the sponge bath, undress your baby and place him or her on a towel. Wash the face with plain water and a washcloth. Gently wipe each eye from the inside out with the corner of the washcloth. Clean the outside of the ears and nose; do not put anything inside them.

Next wet the hair with the cloth while supporting your baby's head and neck in your arm. Use your free hand to scrub the head with mild soap. Do not be afraid of the soft spot. A good wash can help prevent cradle cap, which is simply a scaly build-up of dead skin.

Rinse your baby with clear water, using the washcloth. Then clean the baby's front torso with the wet washcloth and soap. Keep the cord area dry. Turn your child over and wash the back torso. Be sure and clean the folds and creases.

Wash the diaper area last. Clean baby's genitals using the washcloth to wipe from back to front.

The tub bath is done the same way. Use a pan, tub or sink with a towel in the bottom to keep baby from slipping. No more than 3 inches of water are needed. Test the water with your elbow. Too hot water can scald baby's skin very easily. Hold onto your baby at all times and **NEVER LEAVE YOUR CHILD IN THE BATH ALONE.**

Relax and enjoy. Babies do not always like their bath even though others may say so. But with time, it can become one of the most enjoyable parts of caring for your baby.

Diapers, Diapers and More Diapers

It seems like new babies wet their diapers every time you turn around. You probably will need about 90 diapers each week. Bowel movements are less predictable. Babies who breast feed usually have bowel movements more often than bottle-fed babies. No certain number of stools is normal or average. Some babies go every other day while others go five times a day. The color may be yellow, green or brown. All these are normal. Your baby will follow a pattern, once established.

Rinse the diaper right away after you take it off your baby and put it in a diaper pail filled water and one-half cup chlorine bleach or a pre-soak. Wash diapers in a separate load and pre-rinse in the washer if you can. Use a mild soap or detergent in hot water. Rinse two or three times. Use one-half cup fabric softener and one-half cup vinegar in the final rinse. Omit the fabric softener every fourth time to keep the diapers more absorbent. Leave out the fabric softener, chlorine bleach or pre-soak if your baby develops a rash. Disposable diapers are convenient when traveling or on special occasions, but they are much more costly than washable diapers for everyday use.

Activities for Growth

The search for self is important. It probably comes about because we live in a world that changes so quickly and is so hard to understand. In the process of reaching for our roots we can better understand day-to-day life.

How can you help your child get in touch with his or her roots and help develop some wings? One way may be to start a memory book. A record of your child's growth may be more valuable than any toy you could buy. When your baby is older this book will help you share memories of character traits, delights, successes as well as sadness, disappointments and frustrations.

The memory book can record changes in size, appearance, interest, concerns and developmental skills. Some of the things you can include are:

1. **Newspaper clippings:** On the day your child is born save the front page of a large newspaper. This will give

- an account of the other great events of that date. Save your child's announcement from your local newspaper.
2. **Preferences:** For fun, make up a set of questions about your child's likes and dislikes and ask them on each birthday. Record the responses each year.
 3. **Creation:** Save early scribbles, drawings and paintings. Select favorites.
 4. **Photographs:** Note your child's age, and the date and place.
 5. **Written record:** Most important, make notes to accompany each of the above items. Record what your child is doing at the time, what new things are learned, interesting comments others have made and important experiences.

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