

## School Begins At Birth Series Year One, Month Six

Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service • Oklahoma State University

### **Your baby is six months old!**

You can help develop your child's independence. Let your child struggle a bit before you hand over a toy, bottle or blanket. If your child has a reasonable chance of performing a task, watch rather than jump to do it yourself. For example, your child is on the floor and sees a stuffed bear just out of reach. Encourage movement toward that bear. If your child can cover the few inches it takes to reach the bear, allow it to happen. The feeling of accomplishment being developed at six months of age will be important for all of life's later activities and experiences.

The Harvard University Preschool Project conducted a long-term study of the behavior differences of children. Differences were related to the ways parents managed and organized their children's lives. Parents of well-developed children were less restrictive. They were good at judging what their children wanted. They were able to say "no" when their children made unreasonable demands.

Parents understood their children's needs and encouraged development in three major ways. One, they safety-proofed their homes. Children then were able to use their natural curiosity to explore their surroundings. Two, parents acted as consultants to their world-exploring children. They noted when their children became excited, hurt, frustrated or wanted attention. Parents tried to identify the causes of their children's feelings and taught them how to cope. Three, parents set firm limits and were consistent in providing discipline. They said "no" to activities that might hurt their children. They were consistent in their reprimands as well as their encouragements.

To help your child develop fully during the next six months, become an activities consultant and creative designer in your child's immediate environment. Try to become consistent and authoritative in your discipline and your love.

### **Mental Development**

Have you noticed that small objects fascinate your child? This behavior begins with staring at crumbs, lint, even cold cereal on a tray. Many experts once believed that babies did not focus on small items. However, other researchers who have observed younger children, think differently.

Provide toys like strings of tiny colored wooden balls to help your child through this important eye development stage. You can stimulate your child through one more step in this mental and physical growth process.

### **Emotional Development**

Your child is gaining new skills every day. Just like all adults, some days are good and some are terrible. There are activities that just do not go as planned. They may not get enough sleep. Their stomach might be upset. Crankiness, restlessness and tension take over. There are obvious physical causes for stress such as teething, indigestion or sunburn. Less visible reasons for fussiness and crying are uncertainty, sharp noises, fear or taking leave of a parent or caretaker.

How do you quiet your child during one of these days? How can you calm and relax a fussy baby? Steady, monotonous sounds, low light and moderate temperatures have a calming effect on babies. Try some of the following suggestions the next time you want to quiet your child.

Rock your baby rhythmically in a cradle, buggy, stroller or in your arms.

Be sure the room is at an even temperature, neither too cold nor too hot.

Turn on a low light where you want your child to sleep. Turn off harsh, artificial light and block out sunlight by closing drapes and blinds.

Sing a gentle melody over and over. Play soft, soothing music. Provide a monotonous sound from a fan or other motor.

Loosely wrap your baby in a soft, light blanket to reduce random movement and to prevent thrashing behavior.

### **Social Development**

Babies thrive on close personal contact with adults. For years parents have rocked their babies

in cradles, carriages and in their arms. Rocking chairs can help relax both you and your baby mentally and physically. The rhythmic action of rocking provides a womb-like feeling of safety and security.

The shoulder carrier, which has been rediscovered by many modern parents, also helps provide this closeness. The new and varied versions of the carrier give babies the sense of motion. They seem to need the close body contact and motion. Now you often see infants snuggled happily in canvas slings carried on the backs or chests of mothers and fathers. The adults go about their errands, work or recreational activities with their arms free.

Babies also enjoy wind-up canvas swings. Some swings even have built-in music boxes. Babies can then swing and sway and listen to the music.

As babies grow older, they often enjoy bouncing up and down under their own steam in jumpers. When they graduate to the toddler stage, rocking horses provide the same rhythmic enjoyment.

## **Language Development**

The most interesting development to watch for is your baby's discovery of the connection between voice and self. At this age, babies learn a new sound almost every week. Children discover and enjoy squealing. You may observe your child practicing sounds and while vocalizing suddenly let out a squeal. The squeal may frighten him or her enough to cry.

Babies will practice making sounds like "mm" and "baba" for hours. It does not matter what language your family speaks. Your baby's first words probably will be the words for mother, father, good-bye and baby.

Never underestimate your child's ability to understand what you mean when you use words. Deliver your words with feelings, facial expressions and body language. For example, when daddy says "Mommy is coming home. Here's mommy. Hi mommy," smiles and holds out his hands to mommy, baby does the same. Baby may not understand the word, but the meaning is very clear.

## **Small Muscle Development**

Have you noticed that everything goes into your baby's mouth? Because of your child's fascination with small items, six months is a good age to start your baby on finger food. Put one or two slices of banana on the highchair tray and let your baby pick them up and taste them. Tiny chunks of cheese, soft, peeled apple, teething biscuits and plain unsalted crackers are foods that your baby will enjoy.

Earlier, when your child reached for something

those eyes had to follow the object very closely. Now, the eyes get the action started. Your baby can look away or close the eyes and grasp the object by feel alone. Your child is not completely dependent on the eyes to guide the movement of his or her hands anymore. Eye-hand coordination is a small but important step to master before more complicated tasks can be accomplished.

## **Large Muscle Development**

Your child bases each new skill on a previously learned step. For example, your child may be able to sit in a high chair with little or no support. Your child was first able to hold up and balance his or her head. The high chair skill extended an earlier skill.

Place a six-month-old on the floor. He or she may lean forward, balance for a few seconds, and then topple over. Success at sitting and balancing without support will come a little later in life. This tendency to topple over is important to know. In water a baby has even less balance. Therefore, be careful never to leave your child alone in bath water.

## **Special Message to Parents**

The most important quality that makes families work is a feeling of self-worth. We usually follow the pattern we have observed in our homes. You are probably influencing your child as you were influenced by your own family. Did you like what you got? You can change and make it different for your child.

What can you do now? Accept your child just as he or she is. Smile, touch, cuddle, nurture and love. Encourage your child with compliments and positive suggestions of approval.

## **Safety Suggestions**

Accidents are the greatest single threat to the lives of children. More than 300 infants in the United States die each month from accidents. You can prevent 9 out of 10 accidents.

Often accidents occur because parents are not aware of what their children can do. Parents forget how fast their children learn to do a new thing. They can wiggle off a bed, climb a ladder or unscrew a bottle cap. A child's natural curiosity adds to the danger.

Accidents can happen any time. They are most likely to occur when you or your child is sick, tired, hungry, when you are in a new place, or when you are busy. Prevention is the key. Try to think ahead to what your child might do next. Child-proof your home before an accident happens.

Check your baby's room and play area first. Look for small items that your baby could choke on. Avoid smothering by making sure the crib

mattress fits snugly. Remove any pillows or plastic bags. Secure crib rails in the up position. Make sure the rails are sturdy.

Most accidents happen in the kitchen. Keep all poisons and knives out of your child's reach. Help prevent burns by turning pot handles toward the back of the stove. Also, put hot foods and liquids in the center of the table, out of reach.

Keep medicines, cosmetics and cleaning agents out of reach. Use safety latches on all cupboards and drawers. Avoid scalds by turning down the temperature of your water heater to below 120o.

Here are some general tips. Cover unused electrical outlets. Place guards around hot pipes, radiators and fireplaces. Keep matches and lighters away from children. As a safeguard, equip your home with a smoke alarm and fire extinguisher. Put safety gates at the top and bottom of stairwells.

Babies will chew on anything. Paint the inside of your house and all your furniture with nontoxic paints. Also, remove any poisonous house plants.

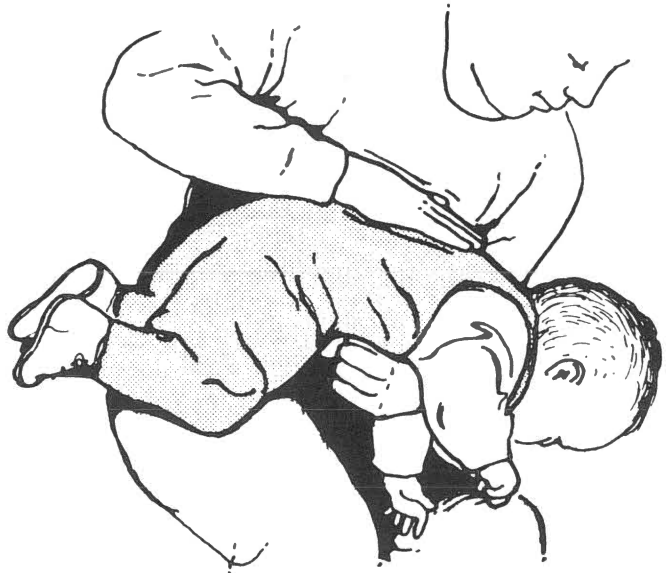
If an accident happens, face it calmly and use common sense. Keep telephone numbers of your doctor, hospital rescue unit and poison control center handy. Tape these numbers to every telephone in your house.

#### **Get medical help for:**

- Poisoning
- Bleeding that you cannot stop
- Choking or trouble with breathing
- Second or third degree burns (blisters or white or charred skin)
- Broken bones
- Cuts that will not close together or that are on the face
- Any accident if in doubt

#### **Give first aid for:**

- Bleeding-control by applying pressure.
- No breathing-give artificial respiration. Put your child on his or her back and tip back the head. Clear the mouth with your finger. Place your mouth over the nose and mouth. Give four quick, gentle breaths. Then give another breath every three seconds. Continue until the child can breathe on its own. Then get medical help immediately.
- Choking-use your finger to remove the object if you can. Give four forceful blows between the shoulder blades. If the object does not come out, hang the baby over your hands. With your fist between your child's belly button and ribs thrust upward (see illustration).
- First degree burns (redness)-cover the affected area with cold water for five minutes.
- Minor cuts.-Clean the cut with soap and water and then bandage.
- Poisoning.-Call your poison control center for



instructions. Have syrup of ipecac (a vomit inducer) on hand. DO NOT give any to your child unless instructed to do so by the poison control center or your physician.

#### **Health Suggestions**

When your baby begins teething there will be a lot of drooling. Your baby will want to chew on everything. Help ease the discomfort by letting your baby chew on a cold teething ring or an ice cube wrapped in a towel. You also may rub the gums with your clean finger. Do not use sweet spirits of niter (poisonous), paregoric or turpentine.

When teething, your baby may have a runny nose. Teething may cause a rash on the face or neck. Teething babies may be fussy. Teething does not cause high fever (above 101F or 43C), vomiting or diarrhea. If these symptoms occur, look for some other problem.

After all the teething, the first tooth is a welcome sight. It usually comes in at about six months, but it may be a few months earlier or later. By the time your child is two-and-a-half years old, all 20 baby teeth should have arrived (see Table 1).

Many people believe that if children lose their baby teeth they probably are not too important. This is a serious misconception. Baby teeth do five important things:

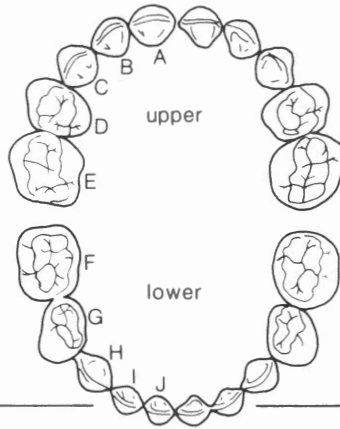
1. chew food
2. help your child to speak clearly
3. guide the permanent teeth into place
4. add to general good health
5. make a pretty smile

**Table 1. Approximate Eruption of Primary (Baby) Teeth**

Upper	Eruption (month)	Shedding (year)
A	7.5	7.5
B	9.0	8.0
C	18.0	11.5
D	14.0	10.5
E	24.0	10.5

Lower	Eruption (month)	Shedding (year)
F	20.0	11.0
G	12.0	10.0
H	16.0	9.5
I	7.0	7.0
J	6.0	6.0



Tooth decay and gum disease are the two major dental diseases. Both are caused by germs that live on the teeth. Sugar (honey, brown, raw or table sugar) is the main source of these germs. Heredity and general health also can influence these two diseases. It is distressing to know that half of American children have cavities by the time they are two years old.

You can prevent cavities and gum disease by brushing and flossing your child's teeth at least once a day. Using a soft, small nylon toothbrush, scrub the biting surfaces of the teeth back and forth. Then brush the cheek and tongue sides of the teeth. Point the bristles toward the gums and stroke the teeth back and forth gently. Toothpaste, although not necessary, should be one that contains fluoride.

Use dental floss to clean between teeth (where most cavities occur and where toothbrushes cannot

reach). Curve the dental floss into a C-shape against the side of the tooth. Slide it down (or up) just under the gum. Hold the floss tightly against the tooth and scrape toward the biting surface.

Cutting down on sugary foods also will help prevent tooth decay and gum disease. Each time your child eats or drinks something with sugar in it, a decaying acid floods the teeth. Avoid sweets. If possible, make your own baby foods and avoid adding sugar.

Baby-bottle mouth is severe tooth decay that occurs with prolonged use of the bottle. It is caused by the sugar in the formula, juice or other liquid. Baby-bottle mouth is more likely to occur if your child goes to bed with a bottle. Prevent baby-bottle mouth by feeding your baby before putting him or her to bed.

Fluoride will make your child's teeth stronger and less susceptible to cavities. Most municipal water supplies contain fluoride. If there is not enough fluoride in your water, fluoride drops can be administered to your child daily. Check with your physician or dentist. Regular fluoride treatments given by your dentist will give your child extra protection.

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