

A newborn's smile: Glee or gas?

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FOR PARENTS EVERYWHERE

“Look how Emily is smiling,” says a proud mother of her 2-month-old. “She’s happy when people talk to her.”

“It could just be gas,” says the grandmother doubtfully.

“No,” the mother responds. “I prefer to think of her smiles as happy responses to me and the world around her.”



A new baby can generate much discussion among family and friends about developmental milestones, especially about communication, learning, and social abilities.

Pediatricians generally agree that 2- and 3-month-olds are beginning to smile at people as a social/emotional milestone. They are responding to human behavior, trying to get your attention, and in the process advancing brain development.

Babies also smile occasionally in their sleep. Most of their sleep time is spent in rapid eye movement (REM), the sleep stage associated with dreaming in adults. But we don’t know for sure whether they are dreaming or not.

And, yes, smiling could also be about flatulence, according to WebMD. ■

Read to infants—really?

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Parents are regularly told to read to their children, even in infancy. But when in infancy? Consider the reality of a child's visual ability and attention span.

Newborns can see faces and objects only about 8 to 12 inches in front of their face—yes, enough to see a book while seated in your lap, but perhaps unable to focus on an object except for a few seconds. Plus, babies first register strong contrasting colors—black and white; as vision develops they can notice more and more detail. This means that your voice and warm lap are what's most important; reading the newspaper or grocery list aloud is as comforting and satisfying as a book.

Of course, you can begin looking at books together at any age, but as parents you may derive greater satisfaction in reading when the baby is 3 to 4 months old. At this age, babies can see farther away, gradually see more colors, and show more interest in images.

When buying books for baby, choose those with high-contrast images and photographs of real people and objects. Rhyming text can furnish soothing rhythm and build language skills. For practicality, choose board books, which have laminated cardboard pages and rounded edges. These are sturdy enough to withstand lots of dropping, banging, and chewing.

As the weeks and months go by, choose books that offer activities, such as different textures to touch and pages with lift-the-flap openings to see surprises.

Develop the habit of reading at bedtime, but most important, look for books that both of you will enjoy. The more enthusiastic you are, the greater the pleasure for baby.

During your child's infancy, take advantage of the books, storytimes, and other resources at your local public library. Make regular library visits a habit that you share with your baby.

In addition to books, tell stories—favorite tales about your family, stories you remember from childhood, and stories that you make up. The goal is to help your child build language and thinking skills. ■

PHOTO BY SUSAN GAETZ



Pregnant? Vaccines can protect your baby

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FOR PARENTS EVERYWHERE

If you're pregnant, talk with your doctor or health care provider about two important vaccinations:

1. Flu: Get the flu vaccine any time during pregnancy.
2. TDP (tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis): Get the TDP vaccine during the third trimester of pregnancy. *Pertussis* is the medical name for whooping cough.

FAILURE TO GET THE VACCINATIONS CAN
ENDANGER YOUR CHILD.

By getting vaccinated, your body will develop antibodies that will transfer to your developing baby, which means your child will be protected against the diseases during the first few months of life.

Failure to get the vaccinations can endanger your child. Why? Because babies younger than 6 months old are at the highest risk of all children for hospitalization from the flu, and 69% of reported whooping cough deaths occur in babies younger than 2 months old.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that everyone get a flu shot every year, that children get appropriate vaccines, and that parents be up-to-date on adult vaccines. For more information, see www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/maternal-vaccines/index.html. ■

Guiding toddlers to desired behavior

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FOR PARENTS EVERYWHERE

“My toddler gets into everything,” complains a young mom. “How can I discipline him?”

“Discipline is an uncomfortable word for me,” says Ms. Mercado. “That sounds like rigid rules and punishment. I prefer to think of it as *guiding behavior*.”

“How do I teach him anything when he’s knocking over my plants?” the mom asks incredulously.

“First, you can childproof your home,” says Ms. Mercado.



When 1-year-olds become more mobile—crawling, pulling up to stand, and walking—it’s time to change a home to accommodate a curious and active child. That means getting down on the floor and looking at every room as a child sees it. The goal is to create a positive environment in which a child is free to be a child.

You may need to do such things as:

- move plants out of reach,
- put away sharp-edge furniture,
- stabilize easily tipped items like TVs, chests, and book cases,
- cover electrical outlets,
- move electrical cords behind furniture, and
- remove all cleaning products, insecticides, glassware, medicines, and sharp objects from accessible cabinets and shelves.

In addition, consider storing plastic containers, metal pots and pans, and other sturdy (and safe) equipment in cabinets that invite curious exploration. Move all dangerous items to high, and ideally, locked, cupboards. In the bathroom, keep the toilet lid closed. If a room cannot easily be childproofed, consider closing it off. Put sturdy gates at the bottom and top of stairs.

A big advantage of childproofing is that it lessens

the number of times you have to say “No!”

Despite all your efforts, a toddler will still present challenges. When the child grabs the cat’s tail, for example, you can remove the child’s hand and say something like, “Pat the kitty, like this.” If the child starts chewing the mortgage payment, you can redirect the child to a similar activity, such as chewing a cracker. Or you can distract the child by offering an entirely different activity the child likes, such as playing with blocks.

CHILDREN NEED THEIR PARENTS TO BE CONSISTENT.

Letting children explore does not mean allowing them to do anything, such as running into the street or sitting in someone’s lap in the car rather than buckling up in the safety seat. Parents must set firm limits and make clear there are no options to dangerous behaviors. Although children may fuss, they find security in limits and need their parents to be consistent. ■