

The Baby Adventure

Parenting Wisdom
for Birth to 12 Months



Dr. Scott Turansky
and Joanne Miller, RN, BSN



The Baby *Adventure*

Parenting Wisdom for Birth to 12 Months

By Dr. Scott Turansky and Joanne Miller, RN, BSN

Published by the National Center for Biblical Parenting

National Center for Biblical Parenting, 76 Hopatcong Drive,
Lawrenceville, NJ 08648-4136

THE BABY ADVENTURE ©2011 by National Center for Biblical
Parenting.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced without
written permission, except for brief quotations in books and critical
reviews. For information, write National Center for Biblical Parenting,
76 Hopatcong Drive, Lawrenceville, NJ 08648-4136.

First eBook release, 2011

First Printing, 2011

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture is taken from the HOLY BIBLE,
NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984
International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All
rights reserved.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

The Baby Adventure: Parenting Wisdom for Birth to 12 months
Dr. Scott Turansky and Joanne Miller, RN, BSN

ISBN 978-1-888685-43-5 (eBook)

1. Child rearing—Religious aspects—Christianity.

ISBN 978-1-888685-48-0 (paperback book)

1. Child rearing—Religious aspects—Christianity.

Turansky, Scott, 1957-

Miller, Joanne, 1960-

Title. BV4529.T88 1996 649.1—dc22

The names of people who have come to the National Center
for Biblical Parenting for counseling have been changed. Some
illustrations combine individual stories in order to protect
confidentiality. Stories of the authors' children have been used by
permission.

The National Center for Biblical Parenting is a nonprofit corporation
committed to the communication of sound, biblical parenting
principles through teaching, counseling, and publishing written,
audio, and video materials.

To obtain a complete resource list or have Dr. Scott Turansky and
Joanne Miller present their material live, you may contact the National
Center for Biblical Parenting, 76 Hopatcong Drive, Lawrenceville, NJ
08648-4136, (609) 771-8002 or visit the website at: biblicalparenting.info

You may also want to take online parenting courses at Biblical Parenting
University. Learn more at biblicalparentinguniversity.com

You may email us at parent@biblicalparenting.org

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----|
| About the Authors | 5 |
| Introduction | 7 |
| 1 • Setting Up Good Patterns and Routines. | 11 |
| 2 • Understanding the Importance of Bonding. | 15 |
| 3 • Calming a Crying Baby | 19 |
| 4 • Feeding Your Newborn | 23 |
| 5 • Developmental Milestones | 29 |
| 6 • Breast or Bottle or Both | 33 |
| 7 • Dealing with Postpartum Depression | 37 |
| 8 • Pacifiers, In or Out. | 41 |
| 9 • Lots of Right Ways and Wrong Ways to Parent | 45 |
| 10 • The Blessing of Grandparents | 49 |
| 11 • Getting Off Schedule | 53 |
| 12 • Keep a Sense of Humor | 57 |
| 13 • I Feel Overwhelmed | 61 |
| 14 • Two Primary Character Qualities | 65 |
| 15 • What You Need to Know About Immunizations | 69 |
| 16 • When to Call the Doctor | 73 |
| 17 • And Baby Makes Three | 79 |
| 18 • Sex After Baby | 83 |
| 19 • Moms and Dads Do it Differently | 87 |
| 20 • Adjusting Your Weight after Pregnancy. | 91 |
| 21 • Be Prepared for Surprises—They Happen. | 95 |
| 22 • Take Time to Journal. | 99 |
| 23 • Making Car Rides Easier | 103 |
| 24 • Sleeping through the Night | 107 |
| 25 • Talking to Your Baby | 113 |
| 26 • A Baby's Personality. | 117 |
| 27 • Your Baby's Emotions | 121 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| 28 • Intellectual Development | 125 |
| 29 • Spiritual Development. | 129 |
| 30 • Pray for and with Your Baby | 133 |
| 31 • A Spiritual Milestone—Dedicating Your Baby | 137 |
| 32 • Read Books to Your Baby | 141 |
| 33 • Let Your Baby Explore | 145 |
| 34 • The Use of the Word “No” | 151 |
| 35 • Going Back to Work | 155 |
| 36 • Time to Wean. | 159 |
| 37 • Teething Torture | 163 |
| 38 • Starting Solid Foods | 167 |
| 39 • Playing with Your Baby | 173 |
| 40 • Separation Anxiety. | 177 |
| 41 • Sleep and Your Older Infant | 183 |
| 42 • Food and Your Older Infant | 187 |
| 43 • Crying and Your Older Infant | 191 |
| 44 • It’s Just the Beginning | 195 |

About the Authors



Dr. Scott Turansky and Joanne Miller, RN, BSN are the founders of the National Center for Biblical Parenting. Their heart-based approach to parenting is revolutionizing families. Turansky and Miller are also the creators of Biblical Parenting University, providing parents with easy access to parent training through online courses.

Scott Turansky is a full time pastor of Calvary Chapel Living Hope in New Jersey. He and his wife Carrie have five adult children and three grandchildren.

Joanne Miller is a pediatric nurse, working at the Bristol-Myers Squibb Children's Hospital in New Brunswick, New Jersey. She and her husband, Ed, have two grown sons. Joanne also works full-time leading the National Center for Biblical Parenting.



biblicalparenting.org
biblicalparentinguniversity.com
parent@biblicalparenting.org

A large, light gray decorative swirl graphic that frames the title and extends across the top of the page.

Introduction

Bringing a baby home from the hospital can be one of the sweetest and scariest moments all at the same time. Finally all the waiting is over. Not only that, but you've accomplished more hard work than you ever imagined possible through your pregnancy, labor, and delivery. Or maybe the new baby is a result of years of praying, researching, waiting, home visits, application forms, and more waiting. No matter how this new little life came to you, you now have a little baby as a reward... and life is about to change forever!

You may have thought you had it all figured out. After all, your parents did it, your friends have done it... it's just natural. But now that you're holding this little bundle, the doubts and questions come flooding in. Here's where the adventure begins.

So many ideas are out there about raising children. You can try to absorb the libraries of wisdom, but soon you'll realize that a lot of the ideas disagree with each other. You may try one thing for a while and then switch to something else that you believe might work better. That's one of the signs of a good parent and our first piece of advice for you as you begin your journey. Be flexible and realize that it takes time to get to know your own baby. God made this baby, and you're the caretaker for what may seem at

times like forever. But it's really just a short time, and when you look back someday, like others you'll say, "It was too short." Sometimes parents complain, "But the baby didn't come with an instruction manual!" The reality is that God planned it that way.

Your baby has a unique personality. The biological and emotional makeup of your child is like no other. That's part of the intrigue and adventure. You have to study your child. The job of parenting is one of trial and error, of exploration and discovery. And yes, there are good resources to help you along the way. You and your baby will develop some unique ways of relating and pretty soon you'll be the expert on your baby.

Sure, you'll want to get advice from other parents and teachers, but much of the fun is studying your own child and learning what works for the two of you.

All children are unique and special. We can't give you one approach or technique that will work with all kids. There is no one right way to raise a child. You'll find wisdom in books and the vast number of opinions from moms and dads who have gone before you, but you'll have to evaluate which of those ideas is best for you and your baby.

This isn't a book about feeding, bathing, dressing, and carrying your baby. Although those subjects will be discussed, this book is more about developing a philosophy of parenting early on. Many individual ideas are contained in these pages. You'll find those ideas helpful. But taken as a whole, the ideas represent a way of living with a child that helps them grow and develop physically, mentally, socially, emotionally, and spiritually.

Each chapter contains scripture. Sometimes the Bible passage is included in that chapter just to encourage you in

your spiritual walk with the Lord. One of the things you'll learn somewhere along your parenting journey is that you need God and his grace to be the parent that your child needs. For some it comes early. For others it comes later. But you'll need the Lord to provide the wisdom to raise your child.

So please read this book with more than an eye on techniques for this or that problem. We designed this book to help you develop a biblical worldview regarding parenting. Build that foundation now and the rest of your parenting journey will be much easier. May God richly bless you and your family as you grow together.



Setting Up Good Patterns and Routines

Bringing a new baby home is a relief for many parents. Now you have the freedom to choose your own schedule and make your own decisions—or do you? During the first few days, weeks, and often months with a new baby, it's actually the baby who sets the agenda. Together you and your baby will work out a feeding and sleeping schedule and you'll learn how to best care for your baby's needs.

At first, you might not even call it a schedule. Just when you think you're on a roll with feeding every three hours and sleeping in between, everything changes. Sickness, colic, or just normal growth and development adjusts the schedule and any routine seems elusive.

But there are some things you can do as you settle in. The way you hold your baby, rock her to sleep, and play peek-a-boo starts to form significant patterns. These are called relational routines and they're just as important as any schedule you may try to develop. During these first few weeks, you and your baby are learning to communi-

cate with each other. You're developing an understanding that will be hard to explain to others. Relational routines form the basis of all human interaction. You are in the process now of forming those routines.

You'll learn the way your baby likes to be held. You'll learn his preferences for how he likes to fall asleep and what he thinks is entertaining. You'll develop ways to comfort your baby that will soon become instinctive. There's so much to discover about this new little person, and before long, you'll develop the confidence and skills needed.

Some theories of parenting suggest that you impose a schedule early on in an infant's life. Testimonies of the success of such programs seem to suggest that parents should move faster to get their babies sleeping through the night. And for some families that's helpful. But most babies benefit more from a responsive approach that allows the infant to set the schedule and determine when eating is appropriate. You'll learn more about why we suggest this as you read on in this book. The key, however, is to know your baby and that comes primarily through relationship.

With a newborn, schedule routines are less important than relational routines. In fact, as a baby grows, schedules will take on more importance but relational routines will always be significant. So taking time to evaluate the way you relate is a good investment in your parenting.

Relational routines are interactive. They're defined by the way you respond to your baby's cries, how you smile and talk while you're feeding your baby, and how you put your baby to sleep. Those relational routines are so important because they teach valuable lessons about love, relationship, communication, and closeness.

Relational routines also involve how you listen and

learn. What is she trying to communicate now? Is she hungry? Uncomfortable? Tired? Over-stimulated? Or just plain bored? Your baby has no words yet, but communication is still integral to your relationship. Listening and learning take place by experimenting and being creative. Does this help? Does that help? You liked this last time; will it work again? Over time, your baby will teach you what he wants and likes and you'll teach him what love, and trust, and comfort are all about.

When it comes to a schedule, you'll want to go with the flow for the first few months. If your baby is hungry, feed her. But if she's bored, entertain her. Parent-directed schedules will come in time, but for now, enjoy the communication and learn, learn, learn.

Attitude is part of your relational routine too. Think about your attitude when you go into your baby's room to respond to her cries or her need to be changed. Your baby will know if you're irritated, annoyed, and angry or whether you're peaceful and enjoy the work of parenting. Yes, you're tired. That goes without saying. But it can be a frustrated tired or a peaceful "I'm glad you're here" tired. As you work with your baby look for ways to communicate enjoyment, excitement, and delight.

During those first few weeks you'll likely feel like life will never be yours again. Walking the floors for hours with a fussy baby, or feeding the little guy every two hours, may make you think that this will be your sentence for years to come. But the reality is that life will begin to change all too quickly. Infancy is a stage of rapid change. The funny thing is that you may have heard parents lament "they grow up so fast" but I'm sure you've never heard a mom or dad complain, "he stayed an infant too long." Time will fly by, so

enjoy every minute. Spend time staring. It's okay. Hold her just because she's yours. Be sure to make the most of these early weeks.

As you gaze at the miracle of this new life, be sure to reflect on how God loves to gaze on you. In fact Ephesians 3:17-19 says, "I pray that you...may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ." There's no doubt you've heard before that God loves you, but now as you look at this little baby day in and day out you may get a bigger glimpse of how great God's love actually is.

You may have thought in the past that you knew all about love. Dating, courtship, and marriage provide a certain kind of love that's beautiful and special. But the love that you give and receive from a child is different. There's something about that parent/child bond that releases a new kind of love in your heart. It's interesting that God chose that love to describe his relationship with you. Spend some time just sitting in his presence and thank him for the new life in your heart as well as the new life in your arms.



Understanding the Importance of Bonding

One of the mysteries of childrearing is the importance of the bond between a parent and child. It's this bond that becomes a child's first model of intimacy and closeness. Bonding provides benefits for both the parent and the child that go beyond our understanding. The intense attachment provides the motivation for a parent to get up for a 2:00 am feeding, take on the role of protector and nurturer, and develop the desire to shower love and attention on a child who gives little in return.

Bonding helps provide security and safety for a baby, comfort when distressed, and emotional attachment between parent and child. It contributes to a positive sense of well-being and even aids in the development process. Bonding lays the foundation for self-confidence to develop. Most newborn babies are ready to bond immediately, but parents may require some time and adjustment. If adoption is involved, bonding is usually a bit more complicated. Challenges such as the need for intensive medical attention create obstacles as well. Sickness on the part of the mother

or even other family members can impact the process of bonding. Furthermore, other issues such as an unplanned pregnancy or spousal conflict can hinder the normal love-connection that infancy usually provides.

Bonding doesn't happen instantly; it's a process and takes place during the normal parenting activities. Feeding, changing, carrying, holding, and playing with your baby all contribute to the bonding process. In fact, you may not even know that it's happening until you get that first smile or interested look.

In order to increase the bonding experience, keep in mind the different senses as you connect with your child. A baby bonds in a number of ways. Hearing a parent's voice, for example, is a continual reminder that the parent is nearby and interacting. A gentle voice helps the baby feel safe and secure. Physical touch is important, so spend a lot of time holding, caressing, and cuddling your baby. Eye contact is also important. Babies enjoy looking at the human face and are soothed by the movements a parent makes.

Of course smell is important. Babies quickly learn to recognize the familiar smell of Mom and Dad. Babies can even distinguish the smell of Mom's milk over other smells and quickly learn to prefer it. Smiles and delight further cement the bond between parent and child. Babies even connect through their emotions. They can tell when a parent is upset, angry, or anxious. Your peaceful, relaxed, and calm attitude can provide your baby with a soothing connection with you.

What babies hear, taste, touch, see, and even smell contributes to a feeling of closeness with Mom or Dad. This closeness contributes to the ability to trust and feel secure.

So be sure to spend time just enjoying your baby, holding, playing, talking, and merely having fun. These tasks are important for your child's development. Feeding times become great opportunities to demonstrate care and love and to allow the bonding process to develop.

Premature babies and those with serious medical needs may require even more nurturing. Planned and deliberate times of bonding are often necessary to help the infant develop in an emotionally healthy way. Adopted children may take longer to bond with their new parents and, depending on the age of the child, that bonding may look very different. In the end, though, the child learns about parental love, where to come for nurture and protection, and about the comforts of living in a family.

Bonding isn't just for babies, though. Parents need to bond with the infant as well. When life is overly stressful or parents are very busy and tired, bonding can be difficult. Sometimes parents experience illness, struggle with the gender of the child, feel the added financial burden, or simply have trouble connecting for one reason or another. These issues need to be addressed and worked through if the parent is going to bond successfully.

Babies need to bond with both Mom and Dad. Bonding with Dad may happen differently than with Mom, though, and on a separate timetable. Regular times spent holding and caring for your baby can provide opportunities for the bonding to take place with both parents.

Both Mom and Dad can spend time bathing, feeding, soothing, changing, and carrying the baby. Allow your child to touch your face and feel your skin. Talk and sing to your baby. Take time to enjoy your baby's smell, movements, soft skin, noises, and funny expressions. Study your

baby and enjoy what makes your infant unique. Most importantly, remember that your baby needs your love and care and that you're an essential part of that child's growth and development.

Just as the personalities of parents differ, so do the ways they bond. So be patient with yourself and your spouse. If you don't feel like cuddling, do it anyway. Feelings will come with time. You may feel like you haven't accomplished anything all day, but if you cuddled with your baby, you did a wonderful thing. The house may be dirty, the laundry piling up, and the cupboards nearly bare, but if you spent time enjoying your child, smiling at his silly gestures or caressing her tiny feet, then you accomplished something quite significant. You've done some heart-work called bonding.

Bonding is a function of time and interaction. God wants to bond with you and offers personal interaction as the means for doing that. Take time to think about how God wants to nurture you. Spend time talking to him. Get to know his voice and see his care for you every day. This time of raising a child can do tremendous things for your relationship with your heavenly Father.

To help the Jewish people understand that God was there for them during a very difficult time, he sent the prophet Isaiah to the people with these words, "As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you." (Isaiah 66:13) God uses that special relationship between a mother and a child to describe his love and care of his own.



Calming a Crying Baby

Babies cry for a number of reasons and discovering the cause usually involves a lot of trial and error. It's not just finding the problem that requires experimentation, but then you have to find a solution that works for your baby. Babies may cry when they're sick, hungry, or need to be burped or changed. Your baby might be underdressed or overdressed, or in the sun, or a breeze. A baby may cry when bored, lonely, or over-stimulated, or having cold hands or cold feet. And babies sometimes just want company. These are just some of the reasons babies cry. Crying is one of the few ways of getting a parent's attention. The reality is, your baby doesn't have many choices when it comes to communicating, so sometimes crying is just a baby's way of reaching out and saying, "Spend time with me."

Over time parents learn to recognize the difference between a cry to eat, a cry of pain, or a lonely cry. But sometimes it seems like the baby doesn't even know why he's crying. He's just unhappy, and fussing is his way of complaining.

When a baby cries, a parent often feels upset. You want to solve the problem and so you look for ways to do so.

You check the diaper, try to feed, hold and cuddle, or just turn your baby to a new position to see if that works. When your solutions don't work, you may begin to feel irritated, annoyed, and frustrated. Some parents start feeling inadequate because they can't solve the crying problem. Parents may even panic because the crying sounds so pathetic it's like the world is about to end.

Since dads tend to be problem solvers by nature, they're particularly prone to frustration, or even anger, when the baby seems unresponsive to comfort attempts. This can be a real growing edge for dads as they learn to be patient when their babies are upset. If you struggle with this, remember that sometimes a baby will continue to cry and your comfort is helpful, even if doesn't make the crying stop. Your calm and gentle voice is what your baby needs. Don't allow her stress to become yours.

The first rule-of-thumb for calming a crying baby is to stay calm yourself. Part of your task will eventually be to teach your child to soothe himself. Your tender care now often prepares the way for the future. You want to communicate, "It's going to be okay, you're safe, I love you, God loves you, you can handle this..." You may even repeat these words as you're holding and rocking your baby. You want to communicate a sense that you're in control, so don't get sucked into the distress.

Here are some suggestions to try as you work to calm your baby's cries. You might try using touch by cuddling and caressing your baby. Sometimes babies like to be wrapped tightly in a blanket because it makes them feel secure, so learning to swaddle can be helpful. Your baby might like being rocked or being in a wind-up swing. Dimming the lights or turning off the TV can reduce noise and

stimulation. Allowing the child to suck on fingers, a pacifier, a bottle, or breast often consoles a baby.

Sometimes babies cry when they're overtired or overstimulated, so bouncing gently and rhythmically can soothe them off to sleep. Patting them gently on the back can have a settling effect as well. Other times, babies are bored and need some stimulation or new surroundings, so going for a walk outside can be helpful. Singing or gently talking, turning on a fan, or providing some visual stimulation may create a helpful distraction.

You'll find times, though, when nothing seems to work. In those moments it used to be popular to say, "She must just have gas." It's hard to know if that's really the case but it does give parents the realization that sometimes there's nothing more that you can do. If your baby seems unable to receive comfort, you may try allowing him to lie on a blanket or in his crib and cry for fifteen minutes. You may find that comforting your baby is much easier after that time.

If however your baby continues to cry and seems inconsolable, it would be good to get some advice from a more experienced parent or even a physician, especially if this happens frequently. If you find yourself becoming irritated and angry you need to step back and settle yourself down. It can be quite frustrating to try solution after solution with little success.

Your anger, however, won't solve the problem. If you're angry put your baby in a safe place and walk away. The crying won't hurt the baby, so if you need a break take one or get another caregiver involved. Sometime being left alone is just what baby needs to fall asleep.

Taking care of a baby that cries a lot can be emotionally

draining. Be sure to step back at times to gain perspective so that you can help your baby in the most beneficial ways. Talk to other parents and get some advice and support. Caring for a baby all day can make you feel lonely and isolated. You may need to have someone babysit for an hour or so to allow you to take a much needed break. Most infants have parents who are quite tired. Make sure that you do all you can to limit other activities and do your best to get the rest you need.

One of the benefits of spiritual resources is that they fill up depleted emotional tanks. There will be times when you feel discouraged and overwhelmed. Especially in those moments, you want to pray and ask God to give you the strength to do the job of parenting. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 12:9, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." It's amazing to see how drawing close to the Lord can get you through a difficult day. Take time to thank him for his grace and look for ways to rely on it every day.



Feeding Your Newborn

During the first days and weeks of your baby's life, feeding will occupy a lot of your time. Sometimes parents feel nervous about the number of feedings especially when a baby seems to want to eat every hour or if the baby is sleeping for several hours at a time. "Should I wake him up? It's been a few hours." "Should I just give her a pacifier if she wants to eat every hour?"

These and other feeding questions can leave parents feeling anxious about caring for their baby. Furthermore, when a baby is colicky or sick, a cry may be hard to translate. Over time you'll get to know your baby and settle into a regular feeding schedule. But in the first few weeks of life, there are several things you'll want to remember.

First of all, your baby is young and immature. She's still trying to figure out this whole feeding thing. Her suck is inefficient and she really doesn't understand "If I suck long and hard enough, then I'll feel satisfied." Furthermore, your baby's stomach is very small, so frequent feedings are necessary. Over time, as your baby grows, your feeding times will be shorter and less often because the process will be more efficient, but in the first few weeks of life

feeding is going to take up most of your time and energy—and that's okay!

Some newborn babies take to sucking and swallowing quite naturally, but many need time to figure it out. You can help your baby by feeding often, relaxing and enjoying the time, and being patient with the learning process. Take advantage of your infant's natural tendency called a "rooting reflex." If you gently stroke your baby's cheek, he'll open his mouth and turn to that side. This natural reflex is to help a baby learn how to suck on the breast. It can be used with bottle-fed babies too. A gentle stroke says, "It's time to eat."

It's natural for breastfeeding moms to wonder, "Is my baby getting enough to eat?" This is a legitimate concern and is a question your pediatrician will want to know the answer to as well. Several indicators can help you discern if your baby is doing okay. First of all, you want to be sure your infant is wetting diapers several times a day. Most will wet with every feeding. That's a good sign.

Another indicator is whether your baby seems satisfied after feeding. This can be a little tricky though, because the sucking process can put an infant to sleep before he's really had enough to eat. Remember too if you're breastfeeding, that the more the baby sucks, the more milk your body is stimulated to produce. So if your baby wants to suck, and you think he's not getting anything, that's okay. The sucking is good for both of you.

As a rule, bottle-fed babies tend to eat less often. Taking two to three ounces every three hours is usually sufficient. Breastfed babies tend to eat more often since the breast milk is digested more quickly and easily. Your baby is unique though, and age and weight also play into the equation.

If your baby likes to “snack,” that is, prefers short feeds with short naps in between, be patient. Remember that the more you feed your baby, the more milk you’ll produce, so allowing her to just suck a bit is fine. Snackers will often consolidate their feedings on their own after the first 2-3 months. If this becomes a pattern and she never really seems satisfied, consider if your baby is actually hungry when you begin to feed. You may try the art of distraction and movement to see if she’s bored rather than hungry. Frequent feedings are fine, but notice if your infant is truly sucking and swallowing - that will indicate an adequate feeding.

You may wonder how to know if your baby is getting milk during a feeding. Watch for a pattern of short, rapid sucks followed by long sucks and swallows. You may even be able to hear your infant swallowing. You’ll know she is finished when she either falls deeply asleep or comes off on her own to coo or smile at you. Sometimes five minutes will do the trick, other times your baby may want a half hour or even more. Sometimes one side is enough, other times your baby will want to switch back and forth a few times. It will vary throughout the day and change over time. It’s often helpful to alternate which breast you begin with to assure frequent and adequate emptying of both breasts throughout the day.

Because your baby needs regular feeding, it may be helpful to keep her close to you at night. Having her bassinet near your bed can make feeding times easier. If, however, the baby’s breathing or normal sounds are keeping you awake, it might be good to put your baby in the next room or further away from your bed. When you hear the cry or sounds indicating the need for feeding then you

can get up and feed your baby. Babies usually make noise in their sleep, so expect some squeaks and sighs. They're just baby noises and don't necessarily mean it's time to eat.

Some parents like to have a special rocking chair or easy chair used for feeding their baby. When breastfeeding, you can feed your baby most any place you'd like. If you're using formula, you'll want to keep the ingredients handy to simplify the process.

Dads sometimes wish they could be more involved in feeding their babies. To help out, a dad might bring the baby to Mom for a feeding time or take the baby afterwards. Newborns usually need to be changed with each feeding, so that's another way Dad can help. Of course, when using formula, Dad can take part in the regular routine of feeding the baby. Giving the baby a bottle of expressed breast milk is a way that Dad can be helpful too. These alternatives can be particularly helpful at night to let Mom get some much-needed sleep.

It's important to allow a newborn to feed when she's hungry. You'll get to know your baby well enough to determine when she's sucking because she's hungry or whether she just wants to be soothed. You'll soon become the expert on your baby, so don't be afraid to try some different things while you're learning. Between the two of you, you'll determine what schedule is best.

When God wanted to describe the process of spiritual growth he used the picture of feeding a baby. In 1 Peter 2:2-3 he says, "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good." In the same way that you see a hungry baby open his mouth eager to get some food, you want to eagerly get to know God and

grow in your own salvation. What a beautiful picture of the hunger we need to have for God.



Developmental Milestones

Understanding how a baby typically develops can help you anticipate and appreciate the changes that will take place during the first year. Keep in mind that any chart or list of expectations for development gives only general guidelines. It's not necessarily cause for concern if your child isn't tracking the milestones exactly on target. In fact, no child follows the chart exactly. Often the progression from one milestone to the next in a reasonable time frame is more significant than the actual age when each is achieved.

When the Bible comments on Jesus' development it gives words that acknowledge that growth in different areas. Luke 2:52 says, "And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men." Children develop intellectually, physically, spiritually, and socially and it starts from the beginning as babies are just starting out. During the first three months, babies transform from a totally dependent newborn to an active and responsive baby. Vision and hearing develop quickly and your baby becomes obviously more aware and interested in the environment. Fixing on and following moving objects becomes

commonplace and babies turn toward familiar voices and even smile at a familiar face.

By three months a baby's neck is becoming stronger and your daughter can now hold her head more steady and even lift it up when she's placed on her stomach. Babies begin to develop some hand coordination, opening and closing hands, and grabbing for objects. Hands are used to explore, shake a toy, and often make their way into the baby's mouth. By three months a baby may begin to make cooing sounds, the start of language development.

During the next few months, between four and seven months of age, babies learn to coordinate their motor skills. You'll find them rolling over from their backs to their stomachs. Their increased intellectual ability makes them more curious about surrounding sights and sounds, thus motivating them to begin moving. Of course this requires a significant safety reminder. A baby who is motivated to roll can no longer be left in the center of a bed or changing table. Side rails and other boundaries become crucial.

Babies in this stage are also developing the muscle strength and control to begin sitting up; although balance is still an issue, they love to look around and see things from a sitting position. Propping a baby up opens a new world for observation and learning with more opportunity to hold things in the hands. Lying on a blanket on their tummies also creates new opportunities for the beginning movements necessary to crawl. They push up, roll over, and arch their backs, strengthening their muscles to prepare themselves for the next steps.

By seven months babies usually play with anyone they meet. They use more than just a cry to communicate. They can now raise and lower their voices and make babbling

sounds. It's during this time that a baby begins to laugh. As hand coordination continues to develop, a baby can now transfer an object from hand to hand and is delighted to find feet and toes. Vision is continuing to develop so that babies like more complex patterns and shapes and may even find a mirror amusing. At this stage the mouth is also a significant body part as all objects to be explored end up being "tasted." The senses in the mouth are used to learn just as much as exploring with hands and fingers.

Of course this again is a safety issue. If your baby can move independently, and wants to put all found objects in the mouth, it's time to double-check the surroundings and remove anything small enough to fit there.

Between seven and ten months babies start crawling, an important activity for integrating communication between the two sides of the brain. Baby-proofing areas of your home is essential at this stage, blocking access to cabinets, bathrooms, stairs, and other potential dangers. During these months babies begin to pull themselves up to a standing position and explore every chance they can get. Their hands are more coordinated so they can now use their thumb and first or second finger to pick things up and move them around.

During the second half of this first year, babies show obvious interest in almost anything, turning it over, around, opening it up, banging, shaking, and sticking it in their mouths. They like objects that open and shut, feel different, make sounds on cue, or look interesting. Language development is increasing and babies understand a lot more than they can repeat. Open syllables like "ba" or "ma" that they say now will eventually turn into words.

Because babies learn what's called object permanence

sometime between nine and ten months, they hunt for a toy that drops behind a chair or is hidden under a blanket, become anxious when Mom or Dad leaves, and can play games like peek-a-boo. It's usually during this stage that babies begin "cruising" as well. They learn to pull themselves to a standing position and then soon develop the coordination necessary to move their feet to walk along furniture and railings, holding on with their hands for balance.

By twelve months babies can often say one word and usually take their first solo step. This is a significant milestone from infancy to toddlerhood. Although first steps typically take place anytime between nine months and fifteen months, this one-year mark is often when it happens.

At twelve months old, your child will begin to understand the meaning of "no" and learn to follow simple commands. At this age babies point, crawl, gesture to communicate, can shake their heads no, and wave goodbye.

Babies usually double their birth weight by six months and triple it by a year. The once dependent baby who relied on reflexes to act and respond has become more independent and can move at will. One-year-olds have developed a relationship with Mom and Dad and other caregivers, and engage in purposeful two-way interactions. They often demonstrate strong preferences for certain foods, toys, security items, and routines.

Realizing that babies go through developmental stages allows parents to make appropriate parenting shifts along the way. Study your baby and learn what ways you might encourage development. If you're concerned about your baby's progress, talk to your pediatrician or medical care provider.



Breast or Bottle or Both

The ongoing debate between breastfeeding and formula feeding is one you've no doubt already considered. In fact, some women have opinions about this long before they're even pregnant. It's interesting how becoming pregnant, carrying the baby for nine months, and then giving birth, can change your mind though, and make you reconsider.

Of course that's nothing compared to actually trying to breastfeed! So let's revisit this decision one more time. There's no doubt that breast milk is most often healthier for a baby than formula. Although modern technology has produced an excellent substitute, there are still some nutrients that just can't be replaced. The reality is that God created a chemical makeup of food for a baby and provided a convenient way to serve it.

Breast milk boosts immunity because the baby receives the mother's antibodies to help fight infection. Because of the constitution of breast milk, it's been stated that a baby has more protection against chest and ear infections, childhood diabetes, allergies, and intestinal problems. Some research shows that the benefits are not only for infancy

but also continue on into adulthood because a proper nutritional foundation has been established.

One of the benefits of breastfeeding is its convenience. There's no need to sterilize bottles, and breast milk is always the right temperature and readily available. With the high cost of formula, breastfeeding becomes the economical choice as well.

Breastfeeding also has benefits for the mother. Not only will she regain her pre-pregnancy weight more quickly, but also nursing contributes to a reduction in ovarian and breast cancer. Of course breastfeeding is about more than just nutrients. The bonding and intimacy provided through breastfeeding is powerful. One mom put it this way, "It makes me feel so good to know that I can provide something for my baby that no one else can."

Although breastfeeding may be nutritionally ideal, life is often more complicated. Reality may require that a mother return to work. Infection or sickness may prevent breastfeeding for a time or totally. Adoption or foster care may require an alternative. And, in some cases, the mother's milk may be inadequate to meet the baby's needs. Or, the mom just may feel too confined by the idea of breastfeeding. This is a choice that each woman needs to make for herself.

Some moms work around the challenges of breastfeeding by pumping milk and feeding with a bottle. This frees the mom up from always needing to be available, but adds the extra challenge of having to pump regularly. When using a bottle the mom doesn't have to do all the feeding and can share the responsibility with the dad or leave her baby with others while she catches up on sleep, goes to work, or is involved in other activities. Bottle-feeding also allows

parents to measure the baby's intake more accurately, especially helpful when weight gain is an issue.

If you do choose to use a bottle to feed your baby, it's helpful to introduce that bottle, at least occasionally, early on, usually within the first month. Some babies that are breast fed exclusively at first develop a nipple aversion and refuse the bottle when offered later.

Some parents will choose to give a formula feeding as the last feeding of the day because formula takes longer to digest. Babies often sleep a bit longer when they're formula fed.

Along with the decision whether to breastfeed or formula feed comes another choice about how long. Some moms will breastfeed for just the first three months, others until six or nine months, still others for twelve months or longer. The truth is that you can decide. There is no right or wrong answer and your decision should be based on your desires and convictions.

When making a decision about bottle-feeding, formula, and breastfeeding, it's important to know the facts, consider the options, and then to make the decision that's best for you and your baby. You'll want to have the support of those closest to you, so include Dad in the decision-making process. Sometimes the first few days or weeks of breastfeeding can be frustrating and painful. You'll want to have the encouragement of those around you. If Dad has a different opinion, include him in the research. Talk about your reasons, and work to get him on board as early as possible. His support will be invaluable in the end.

A lot of guilt floats around about infant feeding. Well-meaning relatives or friends tell you about their experience and, of course, because everything turned out okay

for them, they feel their choice must be the best solution for you as well. Some will raise their eyebrows and ask when you're going to stop breastfeeding and move on. Others will defend the benefits of breastfeeding to the extent that they take a condescending view of anyone who would choose something different.

You must make the decision between you and God. Get all the advice that's helpful but in the end the decision is yours. If you pray and ask God for wisdom and then you come to a conclusion that you believe is best, rest in your relationship with God. Don't allow others to condemn you. Continue to be open to advice and words of wisdom because God often speaks through others, but when the advice turns to criticism, don't allow guilt to rob you of what you believe to be right.

If you're having trouble making your decision work, whatever it is, get some help. Many moms have gone before you, learned a few tricks, and achieved success. So be patient with yourself, and get support.

Parenting will throw challenges your way over the years requiring a significant amount of wisdom. Be sure to make those tough decisions with prayer. Remember that Paul writes to the Philippians about their anxiety and provides them with God's solution. He said, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:6-7)

Those are great words for parents, a verse worth memorizing and meditating on for all your parenting challenges.



Dealing with Postpartum Depression

Most moms see a significant mood change after childbirth lasting from just a day to several months. The onset may occur right after childbirth or it may not begin for several months. After all, your body has gone through a strenuous ordeal, hormone levels have also undergone significant changes, and you're likely a bit sleep deprived as well. Furthermore, your lifestyle has likely gone through, or will go through, radical transformations as a result of this birth. Work schedules, social adjustment, and life responsibilities all point to change, a common cause of depression in general. Postpartum depression is normal and, as you adjust, it often goes away on its own.

The lack of energy and feeling down can be short with very deep feelings of gloominess or it can last several months with significant feelings of depression and discouragement. The symptoms include loss of energy, lack of motivation to do just about anything, disinterest in basic activities like eating, socializing, having sex, or enjoying life.

Persistent sadness, irritability, feeling on edge, and crying easily can also be part of the emotional picture. This depression can be exacerbated by feelings of isolation and guilt. Because others may expect you to be celebrating, there can be a tendency to keep your sadness hidden inside. Some women report that their depression becomes crippling, making necessary tasks like getting dressed, changing a diaper, or feeding the baby a difficult challenge.

Several things can help you work through this difficult time in your life and get you back on track. Here are some suggestions.

Develop a routine and stick to it. When you get up, as soon as you can, take a shower and get dressed. Leave the house, take walks, get some exercise, and spend time with other people. Since the cause of your depression is largely physical, being active, eating right, and taking care of your health is a priority, even if you don't feel like it. Either take your baby in tow or ask someone to help care for the baby while you get out for a bit. Avoid spending long periods of time alone, and develop a support system that actually helps you with food, cleaning, and encouraging advice.

Don't feel you have to keep your feelings to yourself. Get help! Talk to your husband and get him involved in your emotional well-being. What you're experiencing is common and his support can help you work through the challenges effectively. Talk to him about what you'd like him to do and ways he can help. Don't assume that he should know what you need. Honest conversations will not only equip him but often help you feel better as well.

Recognize that postpartum depression is quite common, but can be dangerous to your baby if you let it go unchecked. Talk to your doctor. Often a consultation with a

physician can put you at ease that the things you're experiencing are common, or the doctor may determine that you need some additional treatment. Either way, getting advice and help can often provide you with hope that things will improve. If you feel like your depression is so difficult that you can't adequately care for your baby, then get help immediately.

One important part of the solution has to do with reducing your own expectations. Scale your life down to the essentials and don't allow house cleaning or keeping up on the errands to overly complicate your life. This is a time in your life when you need to stick with the basics, regain your emotional health, and spend time getting to know your baby.

Although postpartum depression doesn't typically have spiritual causes, your personal spirituality can be part of the solution and help you regain your emotional health. When Elijah was depressed in 1 Kings 19, God didn't start with spiritual solutions. God had him take care of his body first by telling him to rest and eat before he gave him any advice. Don't let anyone tell you that if you'd just trust God more you'd be happy. The reality is that your present experience is a difficult one caused by a convergence of issues and requires a multi-faceted approach in order to return to an emotional equilibrium. As you're working hard in other areas you'll find that God's love and care provide support and encouragement along the way.

The reality is that God often provides spiritual resources, however, to fill our emotional tanks and at this difficult time in your life you need all the help you can get. You might want to use this time to talk to God more and spend time reading your Bible. Don't set unrealistic spiri-

tual goals, but just allow yourself to be cared for by your heavenly Father. Sometimes your prayer time will be spent pouring out your feelings to God or just listening for his voice. You might read the Psalms since they're songs that often speak to the emotional issues we all face.

Psalm 42 describes God's presence in the midst of depression. Verse 8 says, "By day the Lord directs his love, at night his song is with me—a prayer to the God of my life." It's during times of depression that you can experience the full love of God in your heart in ways you never thought possible. You're a child of God. Remember that he too wants to care for you as you experience this challenging time.

Whatever you do, remember that the emotional downturn is temporary. Don't make major decisions during that time and don't try to be perfect. Focus on the relationship with your baby and accomplishing the basics. Other things will come over time.

If the depression lasts longer than you think is reasonable, visit your doctor, seek help online, or join a support group. Things can feel quite gloomy and your objective perspective is in jeopardy. Remember that God is in control. Things will get better and you're not alone.



Pacifiers, In or Out

Even before birth, babies have a strong desire to suck. This God-given reflex not only supplies them with nutrition but also is soothing, providing babies a way to comfort themselves. Babies suck on all kinds of things including their fingers, thumbs, and anything else they can get into their mouths.

Whether pacifiers are helpful or not is hotly debated. There's no doubt that they provide an immediate calming effect with some children, but many parents are afraid that their baby will become addicted to the pacifier and they'll go through a major challenge breaking the habit. That fear is compounded when parents see a preschool-age child in public sucking on a pacifier, taking it out to talk, and then quickly re-inserting it into her mouth.

Some moms also fear that early use of a pacifier can interfere with a newborn learning how to breastfeed since sucking on a breast is quite different than a pacifier. Other concerns have to do with the formation of teeth and the shape of the mouth. Keep in mind that you won't have to fear braces since the adult teeth usually come in after age six.

Most pediatricians, however, condone and even encourage the use of a pacifier. It helps comfort a fussy baby and is often the key to contentment between feedings. Some babies seem uncomfortable or irritated and attempts at relational comfort don't seem to do the trick. Taking advantage of the God-given soothing impulse of sucking can provide a baby with the comfort needed.

A pacifier can often help a baby go to sleep after a feeding without the complications associated with a bottle or falling asleep with milk in the mouth. The soothing effect of sucking often relaxes a baby and a pacifier may be just the solution for you. Furthermore, when it comes time to stop, a pacifier can disappear, or be left in the crib or car seat, making it easier to stop the habit or restrict it to sleeping time only.

One mom said, "We affectionately called it 'the Magic Plug' because all three of our kids seemed to find it an instant cure for unhappiness." Pregnant with her fourth child, she continued, "I'm sure we'll use it with this baby because I'm not the kind of mom who wants to breastfeed every time my baby wants to suck. The pacifier is very helpful for us."

Some parents believe that using a pacifier is better than thumb sucking and thus encourage its use. It's true that a pacifier may discourage or at least postpone thumb sucking in some children but don't assume that it's a magic cure. Children are all different and some babies will find their thumbs and prefer them as a source of comfort right from the start.

Of course some babies just aren't interested in a pacifier or drop it early as a source of comfort. Pacifiers come in many shapes so one may appeal to your baby more than

another. If you decide to go the pacifier route, be sure to clean it often and have a couple extras on hand. You may not want to introduce it before your baby has the breast-feeding technique down well since it's often easier to suck on a pacifier and babies have to learn to work harder to get what they need from the breast.

Never put a pacifier in a baby's mouth in a way that he can't get it out. Don't hang the pacifier on a string, ribbon, or cord around a baby's neck. A clip to a shirt can prevent the pacifier from dropping on the floor but be careful that the length of the strap isn't long enough to wrap around the baby's neck.

Be sure to use other ways to soothe and comfort and don't use a pacifier as a substitute for cuddling and holding your baby. Relational comfort is a treasure that contributes to bonding and lasting relationship. Sometimes you'll just want to comfort your baby by walking him around, rocking him for long periods of time, or holding him close. It may not be how you planned to use your afternoon or evening, but it could be just what your baby needs. Every child is different. So be flexible and recognize that what works in the comfort department for one child may not work for another.

An important word of caution: Don't dip the pacifier in honey or other sweet substance. This can lead to problems with teeth and even a serious disease called infant botulism. There's no point starting a sweet-tooth like that early in a child's life.

Remember that over the years, you'll look for various ways to comfort your baby. In fact, most children and adults need to learn how to receive comfort appropriately. God talks about wanting to comfort his own children in

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 when he says, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God."

As your baby grows up you'll have opportunity to teach her how to find comfort in God. In order to do that, you'll want to practice receiving God's comfort for your own life now. Many adults don't know how to adequately comfort themselves, often resorting to drinking alcohol, eating food, or engaging in excessive shopping or Internet use.

People of all ages have a need for comfort. Your present task is to provide your baby with healthy comfort measures that satisfy. Although a baby might prefer a bottle full of sugary juice water, you know that's unhelpful, so a pacifier might be the best solution for now. Eventually your child will drop the pacifier as a form of comfort or may need some help to wean from a pacifier to other more appropriate comforting activities, but that's not a subject for now. You'll read about those solutions in the next developmental stage. For now, self-comfort is good and the pacifier is one of the ways kids accomplish it.



Lots of Right Ways and Wrong Ways to Parent

Fran has known for years that when she had her own family, she'd definitely do things differently than what she experienced growing up. "I hated the way my mother was so strict. I don't want to be like her. I'm going to use a grace-based approach with my kids and emphasize more relationship than rules." Her friend Galan argued, "Not me. My parents were pushovers and wanted to be my friend so much that they never set boundaries. Look what happened to me. I'm going to be much more strict with my kids."

Both Fran and Galan have plans for their parenting styles. They're both convinced that there's a right way to parent. Interestingly enough, both can learn something from their parents, but building a whole parenting philosophy based on one's past experience will usually leave significant holes in the current plan.

There isn't just one right way to parent your baby, although some would want you to think so. Well-meaning people give advice about all kinds of techniques and solu-

tions, but the truth is that there are a lot of right ways to parent. Do you breastfeed for three months, three years, or not at all? Should babies sleep in your bed, in a bassinet in your room, or start out in their own rooms? Should you rock them to sleep, or put them down awake? The list goes on and on. And then as they get older, the possible parenting strategies multiply.

Many parents enjoy giving advice about what worked for them but the reality is that each baby is different, each parent is unique, and solutions differ for a variety of reasons. It's important to listen to advice, examine past experience, and try new suggestions from friends and family, but keep in mind that parenting is a growth experience. You'll want to establish a framework of core principles that will guide your thinking and then pick and choose from the multitude of suggestions in order to develop your style and strategy.

At the same time there are some wrong ways to parent and plenty of them. Parents often reflect on how they were parented. Either they liked it or they didn't. Certainly you can learn valuable things, both good and bad, from the way you were raised. However, simply developing a parenting strategy based on a reaction to the way that you were parented or trying to duplicate what happened as you were growing up can be disastrous. You have to take your past experience and combine it with what you're currently learning about your own child.

Furthermore, some parents face struggles in parenting and tell themselves, "My situation is so unique that no one can understand it and no advice would be helpful." Believing that your child is just a problem kid or that there are no solutions for this baby leads to a defeated attitude. Allow-

ing frustration and anger to dominate your interactions in family life is the wrong way to parent.

Likely you're not choosing between the wrong ways and the right ways but instead are choosing between all the good ideas out there to determine what's best for you and your baby. The reality is that what works with the neighbors' baby may not be best for your family.

Here are some things to keep in mind in your quest for the right ways to care for your baby.

Be flexible. Most parents come at parenting problems with their ideas of what will work, and when those ideas don't work, parents often get angry and frustrated. Trial and error will teach you many things that don't work, and being able to accept the fact that you need to make a change will help you greatly.

Be teachable. No doubt you haven't yet learned some of the best parenting solutions for your baby. Those solutions may come from the advice of friends, reading a book, taking a parenting class, or just learning from your baby. Be open to new ideas and be ready to try them.

Be persistent. Some solutions take time to develop and the parent who says, "I tried that and it didn't work," may have just lacked the perseverance necessary to see the solution through to the desired result. Good solutions take time to implement and sink in. So, trying something once and assuming it didn't work may not have given it enough time.

Pray. Ask God to show you what's best for your family. It's surprising that when you ask and then listen, God will give you a fresh approach to dealing with the same problem.

Remember that many parenting solutions require

changes in parents, not just in the kids. In fact, being the person that God called you to be will help you to be the best parent. Spiritual growth in the life of the parent is the most important parenting tip ever. When parents are growing in their spiritual lives they're humble, gracious, and responsive. God is then able to lead, direct, guide, and correct you. Sensitivity to the Lord is your strongest asset.

You might want to start a journal of Bible passages with parenting applications. As you look at the scriptures through the eyes of a parent you'll come across ideas that will help, encourage, and convict you in your growth. Take a passage like Galatians 5:22-23, for example. You'll see ways to apply most of these parts of the fruit of the Spirit in your life now. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."

Yes, there are a lot of right ways to parent but many parents give up and resort to bad ways of parenting. Keep working at it. You and your family will benefit greatly.



The Blessing of Grandparents

Grandparents who want to be involved in the care of your baby can be a help or a hindrance, depending on their personalities, your personality, common sense, and attitudes. If they're critical of your housekeeping, have all the right answers about parenting, or are just emotionally taxing, then you'll have to set some limits. However, many grandparents are eager to fit in, help out, and are willing to provide much needed support to you with the entrance of a grandchild.

Building an ongoing special relationship between your baby and his grandparents is important. Not only might they help with babysitting, cooking, cleaning, shopping, or counsel, but also, as your child grows, a special relationship can develop with Grandpa and Grandma that will be a treasure.

The top five concerns new parents have about their own parents and in-laws are that they're critical of your parenting, overindulge your kids, are intolerant of childish behavior, intrude by showing up unannounced, and try to take center stage, creating conflict between you and your spouse. If you're blessed to have parents who can avoid

those big five areas, you're apt to have some wonderful family times and even develop a greater appreciation for the hard work your parents did and the sacrifices they made.

If you struggle with any of those areas, you'll want to develop some strategies in order to make a few changes. You may believe that grandparents are set in their ways and can't change, but you'll be surprised if you handle yourself well, how much they actually can adjust in these areas. Sometimes it means that you accept their interaction but talk about the way they come across. Other times you may have to be firm and explain that you're doing it differently. This is an opportunity for you to practice some godly qualities like humility, firmness, confidence, grace, and gentleness all at the same time.

When a newborn arrives, some grandmas like to busy themselves with cooking and cleaning, allowing you more freedom to enjoy your baby. After all, it's been a while since Grandma had a newborn around and she may need a little time to remember how to best care for an infant. It won't take long, though, because lack of immediate experience is quickly overcome by mothering instincts that remain forever. Other grandmas will step right in and try to show you how it's done.

Be patient and grateful for the initiative of your parents. After all, they might have something valuable to say. Try not to develop resentment or be overly possessive or demand that things be done your way. Being a little easy-going at this point can do a lot to take advantage of the benefits of a loving grandparent, even if she shows that love in different ways than you most appreciate.

Don't be surprised if discussions about baby care lead

to differences in opinions between you and your parents. There are lots of ways to raise a baby. You'll want to appreciate the ideas shared, take those that are helpful, and discard those that counter your approach to parenting. Remember, though, that grandparents have experienced a lot and what may seem unreasonable to you may have significant lasting value for your growing family.

Most of the challenges you face with grandparents during the newborn and infant stage have to do with ideas. Use literature and other documentation to back up your opinions and to help grandparents understand your philosophy of parenting. Pass on a book, an article in a magazine, or a web site that gives grandparents a greater understanding of your reasons for doing it a particular way. With love and firmness, along with open dialogue, you can take the best from Grandma and Grandpa without sacrificing your values and convictions.

Sometimes new moms and dads believe that they're being criticized when that's not actually the case. The insecurity associated with caring for an infant can cause a new parent to infer criticism when none is intended. Furthermore, if your parents never made the parenting shift that moves you to adult-adult interaction, you might continually feel as if you're being treated like a child, instead of having the respect of being an adult.

People like to give advice on how to stop a baby's cry, or get an infant to sleep through the night, or how to more effectively feed your baby. Just because someone provides a suggestion doesn't mean that they're being critical. They may simply want to help. Be careful that you don't overreact. Sometimes, just acknowledging an opinion or thanking someone for an idea is all that's needed. You don't have to

do everything that others suggest. Many times the person is satisfied that you've heard the suggestion and will consider it.

Parenting is a difficult job at any stage. Grandparents can be a tremendous anchor and additional voice for your children over the years. The baby years are important because they allow a grandparent to bond with the baby as well, further cementing an important relational dynamic between the generations.

God knew that the special relationship between a grandparent and a grandchild could be one of the tools for helping to transmit values through the generations. That's why he commanded the Israelite people in Deuteronomy 4:9, "Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them." Grandparents can be a stabilizing force in the lives of your kids. Building those relationships now is foundational for the future.



Getting Off Schedule

Schedules are servants, not masters. Although you may be eager to get your baby in a routine, it's usually unwise to even think about imposing a strict schedule during the first two months. If you do, you're liable to allow your child to go hungry, influencing both weight gain and brain development. Many babies are able to adjust to some kind of routine by the third month.

Parents vary in their desire for order and routine. Some like a written schedule and feel uncomfortable if things aren't going according to plan. Others tend to be more free-flowing and aren't as concerned about the clock as they're accomplishing certain goals by the end of the day. Neither is wrong. However, you must be ready to make changes to your lifestyle, despite your personality, because of the entrance of a new person into your family.

Those who like order must become more flexible to avoid undue frustration. Those who are more spontaneous may need to develop more of a schedule to address specific needs and challenges faced with their baby. Parenting is a growing experience. It means sacrifice and change. It's all part of the process and God often uses the entrance of a

new baby into a family to produce greater spiritual growth in the adults. Children aren't the only ones who are learning and growing. Parents must always be ready to adjust in order to obey God and be most effective in the new situation.

To start a routine, take cues from your existing relationship together. Find a starting point that already seems consistent. That might be a night feeding that regularly happens at around 9:00 pm or 10:00 pm. From there you might back up to a dinner feeding around 5:30 pm and a mid-afternoon feeding at about 3:00 pm and so on. If you have to get out the door each morning by 8:00 am you might use that as your starting point.

Besides sleeping and eating, plan times to play on the floor or go out for a walk. Those regular times are also important aspects of a schedule routine. You don't need to plan everything in your schedule. Over-planning can lead to frustration and unmet expectations. Spontaneity is important too so don't hesitate to abandon the plan if it seems best.

Life has its interruptions. You might spend the night at Grandma's, take a vacation, or have some extra events in your life that require changes in the plan. When that happens, stick to the parts of your schedule that make sense and are reasonable. When at a different location, look for ways to simulate the consistency of home. Bring the night-light, music CD, or favorite stuffed animal to keep some semblance of order.

Babies have a way of adjusting to changes, some better than others. If your life is always on the go and your baby handles that well, then enjoy the flexibility. If your baby seems fussy or resistant to interruptions you'll want

to look for ways to keep the schedule. One mom said, “My son won't eat unless it's quiet.” Another said, “I can't seem to get my daughter to sleep easily except in her own crib.” Some children are just like that. You can try to push to teach flexibility to a baby but if you're not getting anywhere you may be causing more frustration than necessary for both you and your baby.

Inevitably, sickness interrupts life's routines. Just when you thought that you were sleeping through the night, your baby gets congested, a fever, or even begins to teethe, requiring you to change the plan. Don't be discouraged. This two steps forward, one step back approach is often what's needed for a baby's well-being. Don't despair. You'll be back to your schedule soon enough. For now, though, love your baby, and meet the extra needs required. More feeding, cuddling, and loving takes precious time but may be just what's needed to nurture your baby along.

Routines are helpful because they develop expectations and order in your life and your baby's life. You may have to try several things before you settle into something that works, but it's worth it in the end. If you know that you have a couple of hours in the afternoon to yourself while your baby sleeps or you can expect that your baby will go to sleep at 8:00 pm then you can plan your life accordingly. You'll be happier and so will your baby.

You may need to break up activities that took longer before into smaller pieces to accommodate the interruptions you're likely facing. If you think in terms of ten-minute periods of time, you can accomplish most of what you did previously when you had more flexibility. It's amazing how much you can get done cleaning, cooking, or organizing in ten-minute blocks. It may be a new way to organize

yourself but it can go a long way to keep things moving in your life. If you wait until you have a long block of time to accomplish a task like you used to, you may have to wait several months. Life with a baby doesn't usually afford such a luxury.

Take some time to develop spiritual routines in your life as well and include your baby in the process. Regular prayer, Bible study, and attending church provide you with spiritual nourishment. You may have to abandon some activities or goals for a time but as soon as you can reestablish your schedule of spiritual exercise, the better off you'll be.

The psalmist writes about enjoying the Lord regularly when he says in Psalm 1:2, "But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night." Don't pressure yourself to keep on a spiritual schedule that's unreasonable. In part, the psalmist is talking about spontaneously meditating on God's Word. When you're caring for a baby there's plenty of time to think and ponder God's love and grace. Those moments are precious and empower you with spiritual energy you'll need all day and all night.



Keep a Sense of Humor

Parenting is stressful. At times it can feel as if your emotions are under a big magnifying glass with small irritations throwing you over the edge. There's nothing like keeping a good sense of humor to deal with the everyday challenges you'll face.

Stress has a hard time coexisting with laughter. Laughing has its way of reducing stress and even physically removing the hormones that contribute to it. A sense of humor can help you keep your perspective, pull you out of a bad mood, reduce frustration and anxiety, and keep you going when life gets crazy.

Almost every stressful moment has a humorous side. It's been said, "Laughing at life's difficulties is like changing a dirty diaper. It doesn't change anything permanently but it does make life easier to live with for a while." Humor is one of the ways you can transcend the challenges you face every day. Look for ways to see the humorous lining in every cloud.

You may just step back and realize how funny this ordeal will sound to others in a few years, even to your kids. When you baby crawls into the cupboard and sits among

the pots and pans, or your toddler gets hold of the Desitin and paints himself all over, step back and laugh. You may want to even grab the camera. These moments become a distant memory all too quickly. Most baby-messes are funny after the fact, and even the sleepless nights become a point of humor down the road, so take time to laugh now, it'll make you a saner parent.

You might say to yourself, "If only my co-workers could see me now!" Just that thought may bring a chuckle. One mom said, "I'm used to running an office of 40 people and keeping everything going. Now with one baby on my hands I can't seem to get on top of things." The entrance of a baby into family life can provide amazing challenges to one's confidence and abilities.

One form of humor you'll want to be careful of is sarcasm. If you're prone to make jokes at another person's expense or get a dig in using humor, now's the time to make some changes. Although sometimes funny, sarcasm can damage family communication. It's not necessarily wrong, but sarcasm communicates an underlying message that often contains some truth, drawing attention to a sensitive area. Sarcasm can be used to make an unpleasant comment under the guise of humor. Be careful.

By setting firm limits on sarcasm and certain kinds of teasing now, you'll build a strong foundation for your family later on. Although it's good for a family to laugh, sometimes the laughter can be counter-productive, especially if the humor is directed at a person in an unflattering way.

But there's plenty of opportunity to laugh when a new baby comes into the family. One mom shared how she laughed and laughed when her husband imagined a remote

control for a baby. “First, it would have a mute button. Next on the drawing board would be a way to change the channel to move the baby’s interest from the food channel to drama to other things like sci-fi or adventure. Along that line, I think it should also have a pause button so that we could enjoy the romance channel. We could also have a button that would go to a guide of some kind so we could see what shows and events are coming up.”

Laughter has a way of calming things down, gaining perspective, reducing stress, and keeping emotional balance. Proverbs 31 gives a list of things that characterize an admirable woman. Women have looked to that list for encouragement over many generations. Interestingly, one of the things mentioned in the list is that she has a sense of humor. Proverbs 31:25 says, “She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come.”

Sometimes we take ourselves too seriously. New parents can become discouraged, frustrated, and feel insecure. One of the signs of health is the ability to laugh at life. After all, laughter helps people remove one of the greatest causes of anger, taking life too personally. Practice laughing and seeing the lighter side of family life and your family too will benefit as a result.



I Feel Overwhelmed

Adjusting to the changes that occur when a baby arrives isn't easy. One mom said, "I can't believe this. All I do all day is feed, burp, change, wash, and feed again. Will my life ever get back to normal?"

Although living with a baby is stressful, you can be sure life will feel much more "normal" in a few short months. In fact, many moms and dads are eventually able to continue much of their activities that they did before the baby came along. Of course, at first, you'll likely take some time off from your former agenda and just enjoy being a new family. Remember that this stage won't last forever. Your baby needs you now and you need time to adjust to the new normal. Give yourself permission to take a break from your former schedule and commitments.

At some point you'll feel ready to re-enter a few of your previous activities. Some of your former tasks you'll probably let go of for several years. Others you'll reactivate in your life in modified ways, making adjustments for the fact that you have a baby. Some moms go back to work and juggle daycare and childrearing along with their careers. Social interaction often takes a break when a baby is young

but it won't be long until you're looking for ways to renew those relationships. Exercise, hobbies, and serving others may come back more slowly but you'll know when you're ready to take on the challenges again.

All parents have to renegotiate their lifestyles after a baby enters the family. Dads may work fewer late hours, give up an evening with the guys, or help in the night with the needs of the baby. All of these sacrifices are part of the adjustment process and contribute to what it means to be a dad and not just a husband.

Balance two words in your approach to life in order to maintain a sense of order and control: assertiveness and responsiveness. Both are important and balance is key. Be responsive to the needs of your growing family, giving when you don't feel like it and allowing your little one to lead the agenda. Be assertive to influence the process, control the situation, and guide the adjustment process. Overemphasizing responsiveness can make you feel like a victim because there's always another need requiring your attention. But putting too much emphasis on assertiveness can create a dictator approach to life, making others, including your baby, feel unnecessarily uncomfortable.

Candace said it this way, "Sometimes I just have to tell myself that this is my job and I don't have a choice so I better enjoy it while I can and have a loving attitude. Other times I tell myself that we need to make some changes here and those changes start with me." Of course knowing when to emphasize one or the other requires wisdom, so prayer, counsel, and trial and error are often helpful in the process.

Rhonda had adjusted well after her first child, but now the birth of her son is creating more discouragement than

she expected. "One of the things that helps me feel like things are going to get better is when I have a plan. When I feel overwhelmed I know that it's time for me to get alone with the Lord and my journal and Bible and ask him to rearrange my priorities, determine my current values, and develop a plan for the current situation. After I emerge from these power times with the Lord I feel stronger and more able to meet the challenges with my kids and with myself."

Part of the solution for feeling overwhelmed is to gain perspective. Remember that you won't be in this stage forever, although it may seem that way at times. Use the discouragement to point you to the Lord and to appreciate his sacrifice for you. Remember the words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:8-9, "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed." Life can get tough at times but God gives strength to do what's right and hang in there when life is difficult. Learning to rely on God's strength is new for some. It requires getting to know God and his grace in ways that apply to your present situation. You may be in just the right place to learn more about God than you ever knew before.

When you feel emotionally depleted, remember that God has provided spiritual resources to give you strength. People who trust in the Lord are able to continue under seemingly insurmountable difficulties. You can make it through this time. God will give you the strength to carry on, keep at it, and hang in there.

Some overwhelmed feelings come from the biological changes in a mother's body. It's not uncommon for new moms to feel depressed for several months after the ar-

rival of a new baby. Realizing that your body needs time to readjust may give you the ability to say to yourself, "This too shall pass." Although hormonal changes are partly to blame for your emotional lows, what's irrevocably changing is your life style and life situation. Things won't be the same anymore and it'll take some time to get used to it.

Although perspective is essential, you only have to take life one day at a time. Don't think long term if that's discouraging to you. Just get through this day or this afternoon and trust God that he'll provide the grace for tomorrow when it's needed.

It's important to have a good support system, so keep significant relationships healthy by giving those people updates, asking for prayer, and just talking with friends. Knowing that others are willing to help, pray, or just listen can give you much needed encouragement in those overwhelmed times.



Two Primary Character Qualities

It's not too early to start thinking about a heart-based approach to parenting. Infants are learning at a rapid rate. They're eagerly taking input from their environment, experiencing large quantities of stimulation, and taking in all kinds of data through their five senses. Within the first few months, babies begin to copy facial expressions, respond to touch, and distinguish sounds, tastes, and smells. They're soothed or upset by certain noises, and begin to develop a rhythm in their schedules of feeding, sleeping, and playing. Babies quickly develop preferences for particular voices (familiar family members), particular smells (breast milk, Mom's clothing), and even favorite ways of being put to sleep.

Soon after birth, infants begin to learn to tune out what's irrelevant and focus on what's important. They learn to distinguish what's different and what's the same. The work of trial and error provides them with huge amounts of learning opportunities. The interaction you have with your baby before crawling and walking is very important because you bring the world to your child and your child is already developing impressions about it.

It's during these first several months of a child's life that you'll want to emphasize two specific heart qualities. The first is trust, and the second is a sense of security, the belief that the world is a safe place to be. These two qualities are actually rather closely related and you'll want to keep them in mind. You see, your parenting approaches will change as your baby grows and new heart qualities will be added to the picture, but for now, trust is paramount. Learning to trust comes when you answer your baby's cry with comfort. That's why, at this stage, you'll want to feed a hungry baby and cuddle with an upset infant. This won't always be your approach in the coming years, but for now your goal is to build trust and security.

As you work and play with your baby every day, trust is developing in your child's heart. Much of that trust comes when the child acts and your response is predictable. Your baby smiles, you smile back. Your baby reaches out, you respond. The cries and noises of your baby are ways of communicating. You may not always know what your baby is trying to say but most of the time you'll be able to satisfy your baby's needs. This kind of communication and responsiveness from you builds trust and security.

Some parents are afraid that they're spoiling their baby. If spoiling means too much relationship, care, cuddling, responding to needs, and love, then those parents are mistaken. They're jumping ahead in their minds to the next stage of parenting. It's at this time that you want to pour on as much love and responsiveness as you can to build foundational qualities of trust and security in your child's heart.

As children grow older they'll need to learn to live on a schedule, fit into the needs of other members of the fam-

ily, and respond to authority. Be careful that in the first months of a child's life you don't over-emphasize those advanced skills. Some parents try to stop teenage rebellion in infancy by showing this child "who's boss." That kind of attitude is unhelpful because it doesn't take into account a baby's developmental stage. Now is the time to facilitate trust, confidence, and safety.

Closely connected to developing trust, is enhancing security, the belief that the world is a safe place to be. This also encourages confidence in a young child's heart. When babies feel safe, they're eager to explore, learn, and try new things. This helps to develop a sense of self-confidence, too.

As your baby becomes mobile, it's important to prepare places in your home that your child can explore. Putting covers over outlets, removing fragile decorations, and installing gates are all part of providing a safe place to take things in and learn.

As babies grow older they'll need to learn what "no" means, but too much emphasis on restriction early in life works against the character you're trying to develop. It's right here in a baby's life that the initial impressions about the world are forming, and if life is safe, then your baby develops self-confidence and a willingness to explore and take risks.

As you think about the way you communicate with your baby, and the attitude you want to convey, keep in mind that the word "no" can be a confrontational approach to correction. In order to preserve trust and security, it's often better to provide your baby with a safe environment without the need to set parental limits.

Please don't misunderstand us. In future parenting

stages you'll see a greater emphasis on limit setting, correction, and confrontation. It all has to do with your goal at that particular stage. When we speak of parenting shifts we recognize that a child's developmental stage often influences a parent's interaction. As children move to a different stage, parents must make shifts. Likewise, if you make that shift too early then you short-circuit the growth experience in a child's life.

Certainly as children grow older, their selfishness will need to be confronted, but at this stage you're dealing more with curiosity and you can use your baby's short attention span to your advantage. Babies are easily distracted, so keep a "bag of tricks" on hand to make life interesting and safe at the same time.

Parents are often eager to get their babies on a schedule, sleeping through the night, and eating at reasonable times. These are good goals to keep in mind and work toward. But be careful that you also see the value of this early learning stage in a child's life before the schedules take effect. You're communicating valuable lessons about life to an infant, foundational qualities that you can build upon over time.

Even as adults, God wants us to feel safe and be able to trust him. Psalm 91 is just one of many passages that reminds us that our safety needs are found in him. "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.' "

Foundational to your baby's health are these two qualities of trust and security. Don't push ahead to independence too quickly. That comes in the next stages. For now, build a solid foundation from which your child can grow and develop.



What You Need to Know About Immunizations

Parents are sometimes concerned about the immunization plan set out for their newborn. They ask good questions about why and when these immunizations are best. Understanding the benefits and risks of the vaccinations can help set your mind at ease and assist you in making the best choices for your child.

In our not too distant history, childhood diseases were much feared because they claimed the lives of so many defenseless children. Diseases like polio and smallpox spread uncontrollably and created widespread epidemics. Today we barely think of such tragedies because modern medicine has practically wiped out their existence.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is a government agency that sets policies for public safety. They have set up guidelines for vaccination schedules that pediatricians and family doctors adhere to. As additional vaccines are developed, new guidelines are investigated and set out to promote public safety in general, and the protection of our children and communities in particular.

The program of immunizing children designed by the CDC has worked well to eradicate many diseases so that actually contracting something like measles or diphtheria is virtually unheard of in the United States. In the early 1980's children were vaccinated against four diseases and now, by the age of two, kids are vaccinated against eleven diseases with sometimes over twenty vaccinations. The immunization program in the United States and other countries is now progressing to third world arenas with the goal of completely removing many of these now preventable diseases.

Vaccines have been developed to protect our children from not only fatal diseases, but crippling and life-changing ones as well. Polio and smallpox are no longer threats to our children. Diphtheria and tetanus are completely controlled in western society. Measles, mumps, rubella, pertussis, and whooping cough, are rarely heard of these days. As parents, we have much to be thankful for in this area of disease prevention.

Of course, along with any medical developments come questions. Are these immunizations safe? Are they effective? Is the plan the best one? How will my child respond?

These are good questions, and thankfully not only asked by parents, but asked by doctors and researchers as well. Because vaccinations are used by almost all of the population, high safety standards and continuing research lead to even more effective and safer solutions. For example, between 1988 and 1992 one of the ingredients used in vaccines came under question. Thimerosal was used as a preservative and this ingredient contains mercury. It was debated that thimerosal was dangerous and the CDC determined to remove it from vaccines. Today the vaccinations

given to children are safer than ever.

The primary advantage of having your child vaccinated is the protection offered so that your child won't be harmed by a disease that's preventable. Those who object to vaccinations often point to the very rare allergic reaction that can occur from the vaccine itself. Other objections have to do with questions about such things as an increase in childhood obesity, more autoimmune diseases, a heightened frequency of Attention Deficit Disorder, and other problems that seem to have increased over the past 50 years. Linking those problems to vaccinations, however, has more to do with speculation than scientific studies.

The reality is that medical science holds lots of unknowns and uncertainties. Like any drug, vaccines are capable of causing problems. However, the decision to not immunize a child also contains significant risk and inconvenience. One 35-year-old man said this, "I wasn't immunized as a child and now want to go on a mission trip with my church to Sudan. Because we're going to some rural areas where diseases like polio and measles still exist, I wasn't able to go because the immunization schedule for me was costly and took too much time."

As you consider the issue of immunizations, remember that most doctors and scientists agree on their benefits. The question comes up from time to time because there is no medical product that is completely and perfectly effective and flawless. But as parents we want guarantees. We want to know that there are no risks. This unfortunately isn't realistic.

If you're concerned about immunizations, talk to your doctor. Explain your concerns and listen to the answers. Some of the vaccines are considered mandatory by the

CDC; others are more optional and their schedules flexible. Determining the best immunization schedule for your child may take some time. Go over the options with your doctor.

You want your baby to be healthy, and immunizations are just one of the choices you'll make over the years about your child's health. Your concern is a good one and will prompt you to consider a healthy diet, good exercise, vitamin supplements, and cleanliness.

Remember that the most important way to stay healthy is to follow God's principles for life. Many diseases today are brought about by lifestyle choices. Immunizations don't protect your child from sicknesses such as obesity, heart disease, and cancer. God told the Israelites that he wanted them to design their lives by a different standard than what they saw in the nations around them, so he says in Exodus 15:26, "If you listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you."

Modern science is a tremendous asset and provides huge benefits for our society. Although you'll want to take advantage of the results of technology and research to benefit your family, you'll always want to look for ways to follow the Lord and his leading as well.



When to Call the Doctor

During your baby's first year you'll have several visits to the pediatrician's office. Most of the visits will be for routine check-ups. Your doctor will be tracking your baby's height and weight and plotting them on a chart to compare with the average growth curve. The doctor will also check on developmental milestones to make sure your baby is progressing well.

These routine doctor visits are a good time to discuss any concerns you have about your baby and what's to be expected. You'll want to be prepared to discuss how much your baby is eating, how many diapers she's wetting in a day, and how many bowel movements are typical for your child. Bring with you the baby's immunization record and a list of any medications you're giving. You may also want to write down general questions you have between visits so that you'll remember to discuss them with the doctor.

Sometime during that first year your baby will inevitably get sick. In fact, it's been said that the average baby gets sick about six times in that first year. Most of those illnesses will be routine colds as your baby is developing immunity, but certainly you'll find yourself asking the

question, “Should I call the doctor about this?”

Generally speaking, calling the doctor has three basic categories. Some problems require immediate medical attention because of potential risks; other problems require a phone call to the pediatrician during regular office hours. The third group of concerns can be handled at the next routine visit or require no medical intervention at all. Determining the difference between these three options can make even the most experienced parents second-guess themselves.

The problem is that babies can't tell you what's wrong. They can't even tell you how they're feeling or where it hurts. You can't ask if they feel nauseous or are having trouble breathing. All the reportable symptoms are gathered through careful observation.

Pay attention to your instincts. Sometimes the first real sign of trouble is that Mom feels like “something's just not right here.” If you feel that way, take it seriously and look for further symptoms. Careful observation can often reveal enough concrete facts to lead a doctor or medical call center to some conclusions about the next step.

Learn how to take your baby's temperature. Typically with infants, there are three ways to take the temperature: rectally (in the infant's bottom), axillary (under the arm), and tympanically (in the ear). Tympanic thermometers are expensive, so likely you'll want to pick up a basic digital thermometer at your local drug store or pharmacy and learn to take a rectal temperature. Rectal temperatures are more accurate than under the arm, so if you suspect your baby has a fever, take a moment and get a rectal temperature.

Prepare the thermometer by slipping it into a plastic sleeve. These sleeves are disposable and are sold along-

side the thermometers at the store. Coat the end of the thermometer with some lubricant such as petroleum jelly (Vaseline). Hold your baby on your lap, tummy down, allowing the legs to dangle down past your thighs. Pull open the buttocks to reveal the anus and insert the thermometer in about a half-inch, until the tip is completely concealed. Squeeze the buttocks together and push the button on the thermometer. Hold your baby as still as possible until the thermometer beeps, then gently remove it and read the temperature.

If your baby is too squirmy for this position, you may find it easier to lay your baby on her back on the changing table or crib and hold her legs up as if you're changing her diaper. A third position is having the baby on his side. Your goal is to find a position where you can access the anus and hold your baby as still as possible while the thermometer is inserted. Be aware that inserting a thermometer into the anus can stimulate a bowel movement, so be prepared for stool to come squirting out. In fact, this is often the first line of defense for a constipated baby, so beware.

The baby's temperature is an important factor when reporting illness to a doctor. You'll also want to be aware of how many wet diapers your baby has had in the last 24 hours and how much she has had to eat and drink.

Here are some symptoms that require a call to the doctor immediately, regardless of the time of day:

- Your baby has refused several feedings in a row or is throwing up large portions of each feeding
- Your baby is lethargic or difficult to wake up
- If your baby is three months or younger, a tempera-

ture over 100.4 rectally

- If your baby is older than three months, a temperature over 102 rectally
- Your baby hasn't wet a diaper for six hours or longer
- Your baby's breathing is causing pulling in around the ribs
- Your baby is making wheezing, grunting, or whistling sounds while breathing
- Your baby has fallen and is unresponsive
- Your baby has fallen and isn't moving one or more of his extremities
- Your baby is having a seizure (one or all body parts are twitching)
- Your baby becomes extremely floppy or jittery
- You find blood in your baby's vomit, urine, or stool
- Your baby has ingested something that isn't food
- Your baby is injured and won't stop bleeding
- Your baby's skin or eyes look yellow

Here are some symptoms that likely require a call to the doctor during the next regular office hours:

- The umbilical cord area or penis becomes red or starts to ooze
- Your baby has nasal congestion that's interfering with eating
- Your baby has mucus draining from the eyes
- Your baby is eating less for two or three days
- Your baby is crying more and is difficult to comfort
- Your baby has watery, frequent stools for 6-8 diaper changes
- Your baby vomits (more than a spit up) 2-3 times in a day

- Your baby has a cold that doesn't improve or gets worse after 2-3 days
- Your baby develops a rash
- Your baby has fewer than six wet diapers in 24 hours
- Your baby stops having bowel movements
- You see drainage coming from your baby's ear

If you're concerned about any symptoms you see in your baby, it's always best to call the doctor, if only to set your mind at ease. Typically the only over-the-counter medication used for babies under a year of age is Acetaminophen (Tylenol). You can use the guide on the package for dosage, but the most accurate dose is based on your baby's weight. So ideally, check with your doctor to know the best dose for your infant.

This first year of your baby's life will bring many joys and much stress. Having a sick baby can be one of the most stressful experiences of all. Parents don't like to watch their child suffer. Not knowing why and/or not being able to "fix" the problem makes a parent feel helpless. This stress may even create tension between Mom and Dad. Resist that temptation. During times when your child is sick, Mom and Dad need to stick together to offer added emotional support to one another. Determine now that you'll work as a team to help your family to cope with the illness and uncertainties. Whether the illness is minor or serious, you need each other and your relationships with God to maneuver this time effectively. Remember what Ecclesiastes 4:12 tells us, "Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken." Stick together. Pray to God for wisdom and healing, but also pray for each other that God would give you

the strength, comfort, compassion, and unity to deal with a sick baby.



And Baby Makes Three

Babies take up a lot of time. In fact, most families experience a dramatic change in schedule, energy, and finances when a new baby enters their world. Although your baby brings a lot of joy into your home, the stress level can take quite a toll on your marriage. This isn't a time to take your spouse for granted. A marriage requires care to weather the storm of having a new baby.

With the distraction of the new baby, many couples don't realize that they're neglecting their relationship together. It's important to spend time alone together to demonstrate the continued importance of your marriage relationship. You might want to find a trusted friend who can watch your baby while the two of you have some time alone. Just a few hours can provide an opportunity to connect and remind each other of the value of your friendship.

It's not uncommon for new dads to become jealous or feel neglected with the lost attention due to the baby's arrival. After all, his wife used to enjoy focusing her nurturing energies on him. Now this new little baby is taking up most of his wife's energy and care-giving instinct. She's left exhausted and Dad may feel as if he's forgotten. To

make matters worse, even their friends are dotting over the baby and trying to care for Mom, and dads can feel left out.

Life sure changes quickly. But it doesn't have to be quite that bad. Dads tend to be more involved today than they were in the past. Changing diapers, doing night bottle feedings, and caring for a baby are great ways for Dad to connect in this new family triangle. Furthermore, the involvement with the baby gives Dad more ability to be part of the growth process and gives both parents the opportunity to redirect their expectations and perspective from a couple to a family.

When dads do childcare and baby duty, they're ministering to their wives. Moms report feeling valued when dads take care of kids. So, Dads, look for ways to help and Moms, be sure to affirm and encourage Dad's attempts to get involved. He may do it differently, or even be a bit clumsy at first, but your goal is to make this threesome work.

But just working together to care for the baby isn't enough. Wives still are wives and need some attention focused on them, and husbands still are husbands, needing love, respect, and a bit of dotting too.

The time you spend together as a couple doesn't have to mean going out, although getting out of the house can be therapeutic to your relationship. It may mean sitting on the couch together after the baby is asleep, watching a movie, playing a game, or merely taking time to talk together about other parts of life that you share besides childrearing.

As your family grows, your children will see the strength of the marriage relationship you enjoy. Kids learn about marriage by watching their parents. Good pat-

terns start when the kids are young. Keep in mind that over the years, children will sometimes require more intense energy and work. You may need to decrease your involvement in other areas in order to raise children, but be careful that your marriage doesn't lose its value.

Parenting naturally challenges a marriage. Be sure you make loving and honoring your spouse a priority over settling issues with the children. When you're able to maintain a strong marriage, solving problems with the kids gets easier.

After a baby comes it's important to give your spouse extra grace. Be more tolerant of the frustration of your mate and don't take offenses personally. Keep good communication lines open and look for ways to resolve conflict early instead of allowing things to fester. Lack of sleep during these early months can make husbands and wives irritable and unkind. Work hard against that natural tendency and you'll feel your partnership grow deeper.

During your alone times together, focus on your partner. In fact, here are three key words to remember that will encourage your marriage relationship: appreciation, attention, and activity. As you adjust to the new member of the family, these three words will help you keep your marriage strong.

Appreciation looks for things that you're grateful for in your spouse. If you're feeling frustrated because of the changes in those first weeks and months you might find yourself dwelling on things that your spouse isn't doing. Thanking your husband or wife helps you focus on the positive traits of your partner, but it also helps your spouse feel valued. That's essential when the activities of life seem to indicate something different at times.

Attention focuses on time with your spouse. You may

both feel tired and consumed by the new tasks of baby care, but carving out time to just talk and listen to each other is important. Look for ways to focus on what's valuable to your spouse. Take time to listen to the events of the day: the stresses, joys, and personal perspective.

Activities provide opportunities to experience things in common and to enjoy each other. After all, it was common experiences that helped you and your spouse grow in your early relationship together. Going out on a date may be one idea, but many times you have to be creative by enjoying an activity that isn't too complicated to pull off. Playing a game, cooking on the grill, or even a picnic in the backyard may be just the experience that helps you both feel like your relationship together is still important.

The key ingredient that helps any relationship remain close is time spent together. When God was giving Moses instructions for the Jewish people entering into the Promised Land, one of the governing principles was about the value of marriage. In Deuteronomy 24:5 it says, "If a man has recently married, he must not be sent to war or have any other duty laid on him. For one year he is to be free to stay at home and bring happiness to the wife he has married."

God knew that pulling back from other tasks and responsibilities was necessary to build a strong marriage. The same principle applies when a child comes along. It's important to value your marriage and to remember that relationships thrive when we take time to enjoy each other's presence.



Sex After Baby

Pregnancy and childbirth take their toll on a couple's sex life. It's not only the physical healing necessary in the woman's body, but the changing schedules, anxiety about the new baby, and the continual loss of sleep in those early weeks that decreases the desire or interest in sex. Hormone levels contributing to sexual desire may take a while to recover. Some new moms feel less sexually attractive or even afraid that sex might be painful.

Husbands need to be patient and gentle during this time, realizing that their wives will recover and fully enjoy the sexual relationship again. Wives want to be understanding of husbands who may feel "she only has time for the baby; there's no time for me." Taking initiative to improve your sexual relationship will help you and your partner. There's no right time to restart your sex life. Intercourse isn't necessary at first. Just lying together, cuddling, touching, and spending time as a couple can provide the relaxed environment to gain a comfortable entry into sexual enjoyment.

A woman's body was created to bear children and things eventually return to normal, sometimes rather quickly.

It's often recommended that couples wait six weeks before re-engaging in sexual intercourse. This period of time allows the cervix to fully close, all bleeding to stop, and an episiotomy to fully heal. Of course every woman's body is different, so this length of time may vary from couple to couple. Many women are physically and emotionally ready to restart intercourse before that time. When a woman has experienced a rather difficult birth or has complications in recovery and healing, resumption of intercourse may be postponed until ten to twelve weeks or longer.

Since exhaustion usually accompanies a couple's post-birth experience, sleep may seem more preferable than sex. Furthermore, some moms feel "touched out" by the time their day is over and sex is the last thing on their list of desires. In this case you might choose to have sex in the morning instead of the evening after a full day of activity. Some couples find that scheduling a time to be together helps relieve the anxiety of wondering if this is a good time to initiate. Although spontaneity may have been essential for a good sexual relationship in the past, planning times together now may be preferable.

A woman may become fertile within a few weeks after childbirth, so evaluating birth control options is important if you don't want to get pregnant again right away. You can't rely on the belief that, if you're breastfeeding, then you can't get pregnant. Although that works most of the time, it's by no means a sure thing, as is demonstrated in many families who found out by surprise.

Husbands, you'll want to be especially sensitive to your wife's emotional needs after childbirth. It's important for a new mom to feel like she's still desirable. Many women wonder if they'll lose that extra weight they picked up

during pregnancy and wish they appeared more sexy. A husband's affirmation and encouragement during this time is essential to meet his wife's needs. Also, it's normal for a woman to feel discouraged or depressed after childbirth as hormones are finding their way back to their pre-pregnancy level.

If desire has waned for either partner after childbirth it may be important to go back to the basics and view sex as a mission of love. The goal is to satisfy your partner even if sex isn't high on your list at the moment. At least that seems to be the message of the apostle Paul when he wrote these words in 1 Corinthians 7:3-5, "The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control."

Sex is a ministry to your partner. The decision to respond when your partner initiates isn't based on the question, "Do I feel like it?" Rather, whenever possible, it's best to view sex as a gift you give. In the same way, it's important to be sensitive to your partner's needs and not take advantage in order to satisfy yourself.

It's important to remember, men, that a woman's sexual experience often starts with you helping around the house or assisting with the baby. It's not uncommon for a woman to report that seeing her husband engaging in household chores and playing with and enjoying the baby encourages her sexual interest.

And for women, it's important to realize the importance of sex for your husband. A healthy sex life allows a man to feel more relaxed and more eager to help out and participate in family responsibilities.

Physical intimacy also has a way of addressing some of the frustrations that might be building during the challenges of parenting. Closeness increases a willingness to work through issues more completely, compromise or overlook offenses, and have a stronger relationship. Sex was God's idea and is a beautiful expression of love between a husband and a wife. When the time is right you'll again fully enjoy intimacy with your spouse.



Moms and Dads Do it Differently

One of the challenges that comes with a new baby is the difference of opinions between Mom and Dad. One dad put it this way, “We didn’t fight until we had a baby. Now we seem to disagree on so many things, how to change a diaper, how many wipes to use, what the baby should wear, whether to respond to a particular cry or not. I don’t understand what happened.”

The reality is that dads generally do it differently than moms. That’s true when the child is six months, six years, or sixteen years. The way we parent is a very personal decision based on many factors. Sometimes those differences are larger than others but perspectives, opinions, and approaches can reveal underlying expectations and values. Many factors contribute to these differences including upbringing, experience, and personality traits.

One parent might want to be firm while another is interested in a more relational approach. The reality is that multiple approaches combined provide your family with its unique blend of relational dynamics. Some new parents make the mistake of using their own upbringing as their reference point. In doing so, some say, “I definitely don’t

want to raise my child the way I was raised.” Others say, “I turned out pretty well so I’m going to try to imitate what my parents did.”

Relying on your own personal experience will provide you with helpful insights, but be sure to keep in mind that your kids are different and that they may need a different technique. Furthermore, you’ll likely develop different approaches with the rest of your kids. There’s no cookie-cutter system to parenting and when you read such dogmatic approaches for child-rearing, beware. After all, God doesn’t treat all of his children the same. He gives each person a different spiritual gift. In the parable of the talents some received five talents, others two, and still others one.

When parents differ they’re often afraid that their partner’s approach will do damage to the baby. Realizing that childrearing is one of the top stresses of a marriage, there are a number of things you can do to contribute to unity and cooperation in this area.

Most differences in parenting come from an emphasis on certain values by each partner. One spouse may value saving money while the other is looking for the best quality. You may value organization and routine while your spouse wants to make your baby happy. Talking about the reasons for particular decisions can help bring understanding that may then lead to acceptance of the other’s views and result in reasonable compromise.

Personality issues also affect parenting decisions. Your spouse may prefer going with the flow while you want to address the issue right here and now. One parent may be more social and another more quiet and reserved. Those differences, although attractive to each other elsewhere in your relationship, may spark conflict when raising a child.

Parents who are most successful with differences have several key qualities. They're humble, teachable, tolerant, and they highly value the opinions of their spouses. In fact, raising a child can help you and your spouse develop those qualities together. Giving in, compromising, understanding, and appreciating each other take work. You're making new adjustments to family life and the discussions you have now can help you strengthen your partnership together.

Take a parenting class or read books on parenting together. When both spouses are exposed to the same material and discuss it together, then you come up with new ways of doing things and new ideas of what's important.

Have parent huddles. You'll use this technique for years to come. Sometimes you'll discuss before a decision has to be made. Other times, you'll evaluate the decision afterwards in order to prepare for the next time. Rarely are parenting approaches a one-time event. If you discuss how a situation was handled and prepare for the next time, then you'll continue to grow in cooperation together.

Be careful of becoming critical of your spouse. One efficiency expert said, "I had a lot of opinions about how to change a diaper in the most efficient way. I shared all of my ideas with my wife."

"Did it work?"

"Yes, she used to take seven minutes to change a diaper. Now I do it in three."

A critical spirit ruins a relationship. Be careful that you don't inflate your opinion of solutions to the point where you damage relationship. Sometimes a little humility and tolerance are the solution. Be sure to identify the most important differences and set aside the ones that really don't

matter as much.

When you come to a challenging difference in philosophy or baby care, get others involved. You might find friends or experienced parents that you value and ask their opinions together.

In the end, most people go into parenting with what they view later as an inadequate understanding of the job. One dad said, "Before I was married I had three ideas about parenting. Now I have three kids and no ideas." Parenting can do that to you. Every parent must be learning and growing. Those who think they know it all usually find themselves disappointed and live with continual frustration.

Colossians 3:12 gives some good advice for all times but especially when trying to partner as parents. "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." When we take that verse to heart personally, relationships are strengthened, communication increases, and respect for each other wins in the end.



Adjusting Your Weight after Pregnancy

One of the struggles most women face after childbirth is their weight. It's not just a physical challenge but an emotional one as well since many women look in the mirror after childbirth and don't like what they see. Our culture overemphasizes thin and lean, and the nature of pregnancy works against those values and ideals. You've chosen something more important than a good figure for a time. You've chosen to bring another life into this world. You've chosen to be a mother. That's going to pose some challenges for your body and one of those challenges has to do with getting your body back into the shape you'd like it to be.

Most women gain at least 25-35 pounds during pregnancy. Because of other conditions some may gain an additional 10-15 pounds. The birth relieves about 12-15 pounds of that weight. This poses an obvious problem for the mom who wants to get back to her pre-pregnancy weight.

No doubt you're eager to lose some weight not only to

look good and feel good about yourself but also to fit back into your clothes. On the other hand, changes in schedule, sleep, stress, and just feeling tired make losing weight a challenge for even the most “in shape” woman. Remember, though, that your body has just gone through an enormous strain. It needs time to recover. Furthermore, your baby is going to need you to have all the energy you can get so making wise lifestyle choices about food, rest, and exercise is important.

Keep in mind that it takes most women 8-12 months to get back to their pre-pregnancy weight and quite honestly, after what your body's been through—it'll never be the same again! Don't try to rush or starve yourself to return to “normal” in a month. It's not even healthy to start some weight-loss diet at this point. Your body needs time to readjust, and if you're breastfeeding you don't want to rob yourself of needed nutrition for your baby.

Two things will help you get back to your desired weight: healthy food choices and reasonable exercise. Be careful about drastic measures. Just be healthy and watch good things happen.

Learn about food and nutrition. Make your focus healthy eating instead of dieting. The breastfeeding itself will burn up many calories and begin to shrink your body back down to its previous state. The goal is to lose weight and be healthy at the same time. If you focus on being healthy then the weight usually takes care of itself.

When you and your doctor decide it's best to begin exercising then start slowly by walking and stretching. Although your routine may provide you with less freedom to exercise than you had in the past, look for new ways to stay fit that consider your baby in your routine. A baby-

sitter, your husband, or a relative may cover at home to allow you a quick trip to the gym, or maybe you could take walks pushing a stroller outside or at the mall. Just start with ten minutes a day and build up from there. A good exercise program won't leave you feeling exhausted when you're done. It should increase your energy, not decrease it. Aerobic videos may provide you with the opportunity to exercise at home, providing your baby with the entertainment of watching you as well!

It's common for moms to struggle with those last few pounds. Although you're doing the right things, the pounds seem to be a permanent feature. One of the challenges of motherhood is its new busy schedule. A grumbling stomach often accompanies late night feedings. Mom duties may make a quick snack of potato chips look more attractive than taking time to prepare something healthier. For some it's the first time in a while that you've been home all day. Your previous work schedule kept you out and about, but now you're home with a baby and the food is more available. All these changes in routine make setting good patterns all the more important.

One of the ways to increase your ability to eat well, rest, and exercise is to get help. Enlist the support of your husband to cook or care for the baby while you get some rest or exercise. Find an exercise partner, someone who will provide the accountability and encouragement you need to keep up your healthy routines. Extended family can also be a tremendous source of support and relief during the months following the birth. And don't forget your spiritual family. Many times the care of a church can provide much needed support tangibly with meals or respite care, or helping with chores like shopping or cleaning. After all,

that's one of the benefits to having a spiritual family, and with many couples separated quite a distance from biological family, the church often becomes that primary source of care and support.

Of course, spiritual strength can often help you with the self-discipline to make wise lifestyle choices. You might meditate on scripture verses that particularly encourage you spiritually like Proverbs 3:5-6, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight."



Be Prepared for Surprises— They Happen

Maybe you thought you were ready for the lifestyle changes involved in bringing a new baby into your family. Surprise! Is anyone really ready for the changes that come? Did you expect a boy, and now Charlie is Charlene? Were you thinking about pretty curls but your baby is bald? Maybe your child was born with an illness or special need. There are plenty of adjustments to make when the dream of a child becomes a reality. Some of those adjustments are small; some are quite significant. Most of them require some degree of grieving and adjusting expectations.

Even if the baby is exactly what you expected, often the work of parenting that child contains surprises you never imagined. Keep in mind that surprise is the enemy of internal peace, unless you're prepared for it. The Apostle Peter described this truth in 1 Peter 4:12 as he helped his readers deal with the persecution they were experiencing in their world at the time. He said, "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you." He then goes

on to give them tips for dealing with their problems from God's perspective.

How you adjust to changes can make all the difference in the world. If you expect to get a good night's sleep anytime soon, you may want to examine that expectation. God created this child for you. God knows what she needs, but also knows what you need. Determine to go with the flow and see what God wants to teach you through the parenting experience.

God uses children in the lives of parents to provide moms and dads with growth opportunities they never imagined. If you have a problem with selfishness, anxiety, anger, or lack of self-discipline, you'll have plenty of opportunity to work on that weakness while you're raising your child. God uses parenting as a growth experience in the life of the parent, not just the child.

Interruptions are now a part of your life. You'll need to get used to that. But how you think about the interruptions, and the baby that brings them, is essential. A positive attitude isn't just important for your baby. It's important for you too. You can set some good patterns now that will last for years. Remember that parenting can be frustrating. Kids will interrupt you at inconvenient times. They won't want to eat what you offer. They'll feel irritated at times and unresponsive to your loving gestures. This is true at any age, so it's important to address your own issues now in order to free you up to enjoy parenting and all its interruptions.

Developing gracious patterns will go a long way to build healthy responses from you for the future. Often that means looking deep inside yourself to readjust expectations and values and deciding how important your baby is to you and to God.

Parents rarely anticipate the sacrifices required in parenting. You'll lose sleep, give up social opportunities, and curtail your schedule and financial freedom so that you can care for this child. That reality will continue for the rest of your child-rearing years.

The realization that life will be different is exciting, but most parents struggle with this too, to some degree. The reality is that your life has changed drastically and there's no going back. Some of the freedom of being single is exchanged for other benefits when a person gets married. The same thing is true when a child enters a family. Many great things happen when you become a mom or dad, but other things must become less important as the care for this new baby takes priority. But that's what love is all about.

So how do you handle the unexpected? Do unwanted surprises throw you off balance? If so, it's time to practice a different response. If your tendency is anger or worry, your baby will sense it. On the other hand, your calmness is contagious as well.

Mary found herself growing in her ability to handle surprises. "I used to react to things with much more emotion than I do now. I realized that fear wasn't the best response when my son was sick and threw up. I knew I had to change my tendency to get angry when my son kept waking up. I realized that I was communicating an emotion by reacting to my son in each of these situations. As I thought about it I realized that I wanted my son to feel safe, not anxious, and feel accepted, not the focus of my anger. I went to work to change myself and that work is now paying off for me and for my son."

Surprises are inevitable with kids. We're not suggesting

that you stuff your emotions, but we are suggesting that you not wear them on your sleeve. The messages you communicate through your emotions are just as important as the words you say. Your baby needs to feel safe in order to later explore the world. Take a moment and evaluate the emotional cues that you're giving to your baby. Do they contain the messages that are best?

Your heart contains emotions, but it also contains beliefs that will govern them. One of the ways to control initial negative reactions is to understand that God is in control and that God is good. When you know those two things you'll be able to respond to life's challenges with grace and you won't have to leave a trail of emotional litter along the way.

In order to make changes, you may want to practice taking a deep breath or pausing before you react. However, one of the greatest tools for slowing down the reaction is to pray every day that God would prepare you for whatever you'll experience that day. God can retrain your heart so that your first reaction isn't counterproductive, but is helpful instead.



Take Time to Journal

Children grow up fast. Although you're enjoying all the benefits of having an infant now, it won't be long before you're asking questions like, "When was his first smile?" or "How old was she when she said 'mama'?" Writing down those special memories will be reminders for you in the future but also are fun to share with your child someday. Kids love to hear stories of what happened when they were born and what were they like as a baby.

Taking pictures and videos is also helpful for building memories. The joys of childrearing are fun moments to remember. It may not seem that way sometimes as you're longing to get out of diapers or wishing that your baby would sleep through the night. But the months and years go by quickly. Just think how many times you've heard parents say, "I can't believe how fast they grow up." It's important to enjoy each moment with your baby. Growing up will come in time. Important lessons and experiences take place at each stage. Look for ways to capture memorable moments.

Journaling can take place in a number of ways. Sometimes it happens in a notebook, or a folder with scraps of

paper, on in a special file on your computer. Other times it happens through photo albums and video journals. Some parents journal daily or have their notebook handy to jot things down as they happen. Others set aside time once a week to review recent events.

Keep your journal handy and easily accessible. You may even want to put it on the nightstand by your bed to remind yourself to jot things down. The camera and video camera also need to be close at hand, charged up, and ready to go. You never know when a memorable moment will come your way. You don't want to spend time hunting for fresh batteries and miss out on a great picture.

Don't just write about your baby, however. Take time to write about your own experience with parenting. Journaling becomes a good way to grow as you evaluate things that work and things that don't. When another child comes along you'll find the ideas you learned from previous children helpful with a new baby. Of course, all children are different and what works with one may not work with another, but good ideas are often generated through other ideas.

Karen uses her journal in a completely different way. "Sometimes I feel overwhelmed by our schedule or just by life itself. I love my one-year-old baby and we have another one on the way. I find a lot of encouragement by looking at past entries in my journal. It's as if I was writing things to myself back then that I need to hear now. We happen to be in the teething stage and I'm spending a lot more time holding, rocking, and carrying my baby around. Household chores aren't getting done. My journal reminds me that just a few months ago I had to spend more time focused on my baby to get through things, and in the end

everything got done. I keep saying to myself, 'This too will pass,' and I remind myself that this stage too will be over soon."

As you journal you may want to have a checklist or questions to prompt your thinking. Many parents keep track of first things, the first step, the first word, and the first time their baby ate solid food. Those are great. But you may also jot down remarkable moments, times when you felt proud, intense love, or even frustration with the lack of progress. You may also want to keep track of lessons God is teaching you.

Greg had a parenting journal that he kept up regularly. In it, he recorded events about his life with his son and his feelings and thoughts about them. He also wrote out some of his prayers as reminders of the experiences. Months later as he looked back on his journal, he not only remembered the events of his child's life, but also saw how God had worked. The journal became an encouragement for Greg's spiritual walk.

Shirley decided that the best way for her to journal was to use a blog. She tracked her parenting journey by reporting on books she read, lessons she learned, and significant conversations she had with her kids. The blog was helpful for her because it gave her feedback as friends commented on her posts and offered other perspectives on her thinking.

We tend to forget. Although we may think we'll never forget this present experience, it's amazing how quickly new experiences take the forefront in our minds. God knows that we're forgetful people. He wants us regularly to remember him and to remind ourselves of the importance of our relationship with him. Referring the psalmist's heart

to the Lord, Psalm 92:2 reminds us “to proclaim your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night.” That’s a great practice for any parent. Get up in the morning and remind yourself of God’s love. Then after the challenges of your day, as you’re going to bed, remind yourself of his faithfulness. Both are important and journaling about your spiritual journey along the way will provide you with a reminder of God’s graciousness for the future.

Forgetting is easy. Remembering requires more work. Parenting contains experiences you’ll never want to forget. Begin a regular discipline of journaling and then occasionally go back and review what you’ve written. You’ll be glad you did.



Making Car Rides Easier

Some babies love riding in the car. The gentle movement and hum is soothing and can lull them to sleep. One mom said, “We have such a hard time getting our son to fall asleep that some nights we take a car ride for fifteen minutes. That’s all it takes and he’s out.” Other babies have a hard time riding in a car. They fuss, scream, and fight the restrained environment.

Here are a few things you can try in order to make car rides a little easier. First, you’ll want to check to make sure that the straps aren’t too tight and the fabric is comfortable. Adjusting the seat or even finding a seat that’s more comfy may remove the irritation.

You may also want to adjust your schedule to reduce the length of the car rides when possible. Breaking up your day with shorter errands can help some babies enjoy the ride. Planning longer car rides according to your child’s nap schedule can also be helpful.

Some babies get bored when riding in a car and may feel irritated by the confinement. If that’s the case then providing some stimulation may help. Babies can be entertained by an engaging toy, a small mirror, or pleasant

music. In fact, you may want to get a toy that's only available to your child while in the car. That will make the car ride a more interesting activity.

Sometimes babies don't like the car because they miss parental attention. A mom who is driving isn't able to care for and attend to a child as easily. Take time to talk to your baby during car rides. Your voice and interaction may provide the reassurance that you're available and willing to interact.

It's quite possible that you're doing all these things plus more but your baby is still unhappy in the car. At these points you'll have to learn to endure the fussiness or temper tantrums. There's only so much you can do as a parent; car rides aren't optional. During those fussy times, you'll just have to be as gentle and consoling as possible with your baby and proceed. Make sure he's fed and has on a clean diaper. Double check that she isn't too warm or too cold, doesn't have the sun in her eyes, and is generally safe and comfortable – just confined. If that's the only problem, then pursue what needs to be done, knowing that your baby will adapt eventually.

If you're taking your baby on a long trip, be sure to plan sufficient breaks for your son or daughter to have a change of position. We all like to get out and stretch our legs after riding for some time, but often when the car stops, your baby is just moved to another form of sitting. Since your child can't walk, be creative to find alternatives. Remember that your baby also needs to stretch his muscles and reposition for a while. Lying flat on a blanket or in an adjustable stroller can give your baby the relief that's needed. Sometimes just pulling over and feeding an infant or holding and walking a baby for a bit can break what otherwise appears to be a rather traumatic experience. You'll want

to plan margin into your schedule so that you have time to give a little extra care here and there. Margin comes through planning and self-discipline but practice in this area provides new habits that will allow you to be more at peace in general instead of feeling under pressure to make a deadline or get somewhere with little time to spare.

The challenge of driving with a crying baby is difficult but it can be a rather common occurrence in some families. You'll want to deal with your own heart. Sometimes you do what you can to make your baby happy but in the end it may not work. Take this opportunity to practice being calm and not allowing yourself to become tense and angry. Isaiah 26:3 is a good verse to meditate on and pray back to God when things aren't going well outside and begin to affect your heart. "You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you."

Too often parents feel helpless during a child's emotional episode and resort to joining the anger party. You want to be sympathetic to your baby's struggle at that moment but also you want to remain calm and in control of yourself. Eventually your baby will stop crying and settle down.

Some parents feel overwhelmed by a sense of inadequacy when they can't calm their upset baby. You're not a bad parent if your baby cries. You'll want to speak truth into your own heart in those challenging moments by saying things like, "This will be over soon. We're going to make it. It's not the end of the world." You don't want to complicate the situation by adding your stress to an already difficult ride. Driving is challenging enough without having a screaming child in the back seat. Do what's necessary to focus on your driving so that you can arrive safely at

your destination.

You don't have to feel as if you're damaging your child permanently simply because you can't satisfy her needs at this moment. Life will go on. Over time, your baby will learn how to respond to challenges in life. The best you can do now is to prepare well, look out for ways to make it better, remain calm, and trust God for the rest. Your peace in a difficult situation will go a long way now and over the years to communicate a sense of confidence for handling problems.



Sleeping through the Night

Parenting an infant can feel like a sleep deprivation experiment. You probably didn't realize how much you could accomplish with so little sleep. In fact, having a baby sleep through the night is usually the top item on the parent's wish list.

Some babies seem to do okay falling into a sleep schedule that works for everyone, but many babies don't. In fact we think it's unfortunate when well-meaning parents advise new moms and dads that if you do the right things then the baby will be sleeping through the night by six weeks. Maybe that's encouraging for you if you're at week three or four, but what if you're at week seven, or ten, and little Johnny is still screaming at 2:00 am?

First, realize that newborns need to eat regularly. In fact, their small bodies need nourishment every few hours so sleeping through the night isn't even a good idea for young infants. The smaller your baby, the more important those nighttime feedings are. Furthermore, newborn babies have social needs that don't resonate with a clock. Your love and care are important and the sacrifice you make now will be most helpful for your growing infant.

Don't allow the pressure of others to force you to work on getting your baby to sleep through the night. If your baby is waking up every hour or two in the night you may want to address the issue. However, if your baby is waking up once or twice a night and you're able to deal with it easily, then you might just let things go for a while, realizing that your baby will eventually grow out of nighttime restlessness.

As babies get older, they wake up for a variety of reasons and look for Mom or Dad to put them back to sleep. Sometimes your baby will be hungry or need a diaper change, but babies sometimes wake up for no apparent reason. We all wake up from time to time in the midst of sleep. Babies (and sometimes older children too) often need help and reassurance in order to go back to sleep.

Don't be surprised when your baby finally sleeps for a good stretch of time. One mom woke up in a panic when she realized that her son had been sleeping for six hours. She rushed into his room only to find him sleeping comfortably. Most babies, by the time they're about six months old, can sleep six to eight hours at a time; hopefully you'll be able to synchronize that time with your own sleep schedule. Some children won't learn how to sleep on their own until they're three or four years old unless you do some things to influence the process.

Do what you can to encourage a sleep routine. If you try to feed your daughter late in the evening and then attempt to put her to bed at a consistent time each night, you may gain some success at getting on a regular nighttime schedule. If your baby is four months or younger, you'll likely be feeding once or twice during the night. Stretching out the times between feeding by the end of this stage is a

worthy goal. By four to six months most infants don't need to eat more than once during the night, and soon after that you can drop the nighttime feeding altogether. That will encourage longer sleeping times and hopefully move you toward sleeping through the night.

If your baby takes long naps you might reduce the length of the nap in order to increase the need for sleep at night. Sometimes this means simply allowing your baby to sleep in a well-lit room or turning some music on after the baby has slept for a while. Of course, picking your baby up and being active will also start to move your baby into more predictable schedules. If your baby tends to stay up late at night and sleep in, you might wake the baby up earlier in the morning to encourage sleep at an earlier hour. Feeding your baby more during the day or at bedtime may provide the nourishment necessary to make it through the night. Although hunger isn't the only reason a baby wakes, it's a common one. By increasing the food during the day, your baby may not need as much at night.

Try to keep noise and stimulation to a minimum. Babies get used to the everyday noise of your home. It's amazing how the sounds of cars from a busy street or the air conditioner going on and off just outside your baby's room may not wake your baby but loud conversation or TV may prevent sound sleep. Look for ways to minimize disruptions. When a baby wakes up and begins to cry you may find that, by you not responding, your baby will go right back to sleep after a few minutes. Continued crying is often the sign of a problem, but if you just put your daughter back to sleep an hour ago, you may endure a few minutes of crying to allow your baby to go back to sleep on her own.

Some babies get used to being picked up every time

they cry. If you want to encourage sleeping through the night, you may choose to simply pat the baby's back but refrain from picking her up. This teaches your baby to fall back to sleep on her own instead of being rocked or caressed. This technique can be particularly helpful when your infant is older and you know you don't need to feed any more.

Keep in mind that sleeping through the night often takes time to develop. And setbacks are common. You may start with an occasional good night's sleep and then find yourself right back to where you started. Even when a child has been sleeping through the night for some time, things change. A growth spurt may require more feeding, or illness may make sleep more difficult. Sometimes changes in the family's schedule, vacations, or a few late nights can throw off the baby's pattern and require some time to return to a better routine.

Although you may continue to work on getting your baby to sleep through the night, you might also want to approach the solution a little differently. If Mom is with the baby most of the day, maybe Dad can take on some night-time shifts.

If all else fails and you find yourself up at night with your baby, try to enjoy the moment. One mom said, "It's hard for me to wake up and care for my son, but when I get myself set up in the rocker I actually enjoy the alone time with him. No other noise distracts us. In the dim light I look at those tiny hands and cute little nose. I thank God for the privilege of being a mom."

David wrote a number of psalms by pondering God's goodness. He said in Psalm 40:5, "Many, O LORD my God, are the wonders you have done. The things you planned

for us no one can recount to you; were I to speak and tell of them, they would be too many to declare.”

The baby you hold in your arms is a miracle and a gift from your heavenly Father. Pray for patience, peace, and strength ... and enjoy your gift ... even at night.



Talking to Your Baby

It's important to talk to your baby. Your voice provides the first lessons in communication. You may wonder what your infant understands at this age but keep in mind that you're communicating more than just words. Your tone of voice, facial expression, and inflection all portray an important message that says, "I'm interested in you. You're important. I love you."

Babies are also learning to communicate. Crying is one of the first ways a baby expresses wants and needs. It isn't long, however, before grunts, pointing and reaching, cooing, and wide-eyed anticipation tell you exactly what your baby wants. Your verbal and non-verbal interaction with your child is essential for good language development and forms the basis for intelligence and learning.

When you speak to a baby, you don't have to use "baby talk" to make sense. In fact, using simple word structure with wide eyes, exaggerated facial expressions, and large tone inflections provides babies with an interesting communication experience. Look into your baby's eyes and enjoy the dialogue. Your baby is learning very quickly and it won't be long before he learns enough language to copy

you. Babies receive language messages long before they learn to give them. Your baby will understand much more than you can imagine and it won't be long before she can begin to express herself more clearly to you. Language development takes time and a lot of experience is important.

Use touch along with words to communicate. A squeeze, cuddle time, or touching hands and feet while talking gives babies multiple ways to pick up on the messages you're sharing. Just talk about your day and about the activities you're engaged in. This dialogue helps babies of any age learn more about their world and understand language better.

Carrying on conversation with your baby all day long helps learning take place in practical ways. When you say, "I'm going to get dressed and then I'm going to change you," you teach your baby what to anticipate. When you say, "I'm going to put this blanket on you now," you're teaching vocabulary. But these simple sentences also tell a baby that you care and value the relationship.

Your baby's name is one of the top words to use along with "mommy" and "daddy" and the names of siblings. As your baby makes sounds and expressions you may want to reflect them back by imitation. Copying those sounds and repeating them gives your baby initial experiences in two-way communication and the reflection encourages more interaction. In addition, you might make observations like, "It looks like Johnny is hungry." Or, "You have a pretty smile." Don't expect an answer to your questions, but the use of different kinds of communication helps a child learn and grow.

Respond to your baby's language initiatives. When your baby grunts or calls, take notice and communicate back.

You might say, “Are you trying to tell me something?” or, “Did you want some more food?” When you respond to your baby’s noises you’re teaching that communication works and that it’s a give-and-take process. Babies learn to coo and then wait for a response. This is the very beginning of conversation. Take advantage of these special interactions with your baby.

Encourage your baby to interact with the world by saying things like, “Say hi to Ricky,” or “Point to the door.” When your baby is ready you can use body parts, simple objects, and common activities to build vocabulary and communication patterns, “Point to your nose,” or “Put your hand on your hair.” When your baby turns her head you might say, “Is that your sister coming into the room?”

You can use this time to begin teaching children about God by talking about prayer, singing worship songs, and telling Bible stories. When your baby is sitting in a high chair and ready to eat, take a few seconds to pray. Put your hands over your baby’s hands and just say, “Thank you Jesus for this food. Amen.” This simple act can become a routine and your baby will grow into a habit of praying before a meal or before bed.

Babies love music. Singing songs over and over again becomes a way for babies to learn new words as well as tonal inflection, pitch, and other musical elements of communication. Sing children’s songs but also sing songs of worship and praise to help children learn how to communicate with God through music.

Most importantly, just enjoy your baby. If you view your child as a companion and talk as you move around the house or get in and out of the car, you’ll be building great patterns of dialogue that will last for years to come.

Sometimes God communicates to us in ways we don't fully understand. It takes time to learn what God is saying and even how he says it. Even Elijah the prophet had to learn this important lesson. In 1 Kings 19:9-18 God wanted to teach Elijah how he communicates in different ways, so he told Elijah to go up on a mountain to listen to the message. While up there, a storm, an earthquake, and a fire all came by, but God wasn't in any of those. Next came a still small voice. God was whispering to Elijah. In fact, that experience taught Elijah how to listen to God more carefully. Parents also have some important things to learn about communicating with God. Much of that comes through the experience of interacting with your heavenly Father. Learning how to communicate takes time, and practicing is time well spent.

A Baby's Personality

God makes each baby unique. Of course, one of the first observations of a newborn is that she has her father's eyes or her mother's nose. You'll find that your baby will have many qualities, both positive and negative, that resemble your own. At the same time, you'll see some distinct differences in your infant that at times may produce frustration but also an admiration of God who is so creative.

Temperament and personality are part of what makes your baby unique. Some babies like a lot of stimulation whereas others like more peace and quiet. Some infants are very active and others are more calm, some are noisy and others are more quiet. Some just love to be touched and others don't seem to be comforted in the same way. Hundreds of different traits combine to make your child the person that he or she is.

One mom made this observation, "When my little boy was six months old, he could entertain himself for long periods of time with a single toy, seemingly examining it and observing it from all angles. He seemed content to play alone. My daughter was completely different. At

six months she was always trying to get my attention and wanted me to entertain her. They're so different."

Some parents with two children describe them as complete opposites until the third baby comes along. This one seems to be completely different from the first two. Yes, that's how it is with people. God makes each person unique and you can see many of those personality traits early on, even in babyhood.

Personality has to do with things such as one's activity level, desire for social interaction, flexibility, emotional intensity, persistence, and distractibility. The combinations are endless, providing a unique blend of characteristics.

Sometimes parents become overly concerned with personality differences and start imagining life-long problems. Just because a child is active doesn't mean that Attention Deficit Disorder or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder is the problem. A child who tends to be more frustrated doesn't necessarily have an explosive anger disorder. Personalities differ and one of your goals is to identify those unique traits in your child and to channel them into appropriate responses.

Knowing that your baby is an early riser or is easily startled, or happy-go-lucky, can help you as you plan your schedule or choose activities to do with your baby. You may even plan your routine based around certain qualities you see in your baby. One mom planned her errands in the morning because her daughter was typically alert and more able to handle the morning excursions. Her friend was just the opposite. She planned her errands for afternoon because her baby seemed to take a long time to get comfortable with the day.

We aren't suggesting that you must always cater to

your child's desires or wishes when planning your schedule. Most babies are quite adaptable to changing situations. But a baby's personality is one factor to consider as you organize your life. Now you have another person to work with as you maneuver through your day. Even if you know that your baby likes things a certain way and you can't accommodate him, you can be compassionate as you try to expand his ability to deal with the necessities of life.

Although a baby's personality traits may be different than yours or challenging at times, personality itself is neither good nor bad. Of course, any trait taken too far can become overbearing, and a person can't excuse sin by saying, "That's just the way I am." Even good qualities can be misused. If you perceive your baby to have some challenging personality traits, look for the positive side. The stubborn child, for example, may be persevering. The emotional child may have a good quality of sensitivity. As you identify personality traits in your baby you'll want to look for ways to emphasize the positive.

Don't take your baby's personality differences personally. Some babies don't like as much cuddling as others. They aren't comforted by a lot of touching and sometimes prefer to be left alone. If you enjoy giving love by touching you might feel hurt that your baby doesn't want to experience love in the same way. Part of the closeness you'll experience with your child over the years will require that you become a student of this other unique person that God has placed in your life. When possible, encourage your baby's uniqueness and delight in her special qualities. Take time to thank the Lord for them. The work you do to understand your baby will help you know how best to give and receive love.

Remember that personality isn't an excuse for wrong behavior. We all must adjust our personalities to conform to God's desires. Personality is molded by character. A baby who is more intense will need to learn qualities like patience, tolerance, and flexibility to stay on the right track. You'll have time over the years to work on character and heart development. The work you do now to study your baby and understand personality differences will give you greater insight for your parenting over the years.

Remember that your child's personality was prescribed and defined by your heavenly Father. As you see unique traits displayed, take time to praise and thank the Lord. Psalm 139:13-15 says this about every baby, "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth."

Your Baby's Emotions

“**M**y baby seems angry,” one mom reported. “Is that possible? Should I discipline him? He’s only four months old, but I don’t want to encourage it and develop bad patterns.”

This mom is asking a good question. Emotions are a part of our lives. We all experience emotions and interpret the emotions of others. Some babies seem to demonstrate anger at a young age, but the anger of an infant isn’t to be interpreted the same as a demonstration of adult anger. Babies have very few choices when it comes to expressing needs and desires. They can’t communicate with words but they can display emotion. Be careful when you think your baby is angry. Likely he’s communicating an unmet desire, or a blocked goal. This isn’t the time to begin discipline, but a time to respond to the need.

Other babies appear to be anxious or nervous, easily reacting to sounds, activity, or disturbances. You might characterize them as sensitive. A controlled environment seems necessary in order for this baby to get through a decent nap, and that includes temperature, light, and noise, a rather challenging task in most households. This baby may

appear jumpy or easily upset.

Other babies tend to get overwhelmed easily. Dramatic crying or uncontrollable screaming can make you wonder if your child is possessed or has some psychological problem needing some form of therapy now, at just a few months of age.

If a baby seems to be expressing anger or appears to be quite sensitive, this is usually an indication of a child with a greater emotional makeup. Some kids have an extra scoop of emotion. It's part of their God-given design. Please keep in mind that, when handled well, this is an asset, not a curse. Emotional people are usually able to better understand the emotions of others. They can sense the emotional climate in a room and know when another person is hurting. Our culture sometimes views emotions as negative attributes. But when you think about it you see that those who learn to use their emotional sensitivity in positive ways become great counselors, pastors, or even salesmen who can sense the best time to clinch a deal.

A child who is easily overwhelmed with emotion, or experiences emotions with a degree of intensity, will likely be that way for all of life. You don't have to solve all of the emotional problems of a child in the baby stage. One of the things you can do now though is to teach about comfort. As your child gets older, you'll want to teach more about anger and anxiety and how to respond to them, but for now, view your child's emotion as a cry for help, reaching out either for comfort or for solutions to life's problems.

By bringing comfort or solutions into your baby's life you teach a number of things. First of all, you teach that their communication and cries for help work. A solution is produced. Eventually you'll teach your child how to use

manners and ask with graciousness, but for now you're teaching that solutions are available when you initiate. Babies also learn to trust through experience. When Mom or Dad resolves the problem or brings comfort to a difficult situation, your baby learns that life is predictable, a foundational belief in order for trust to develop.

Infancy is a time to learn about comfort and security. Take time to soothe an angry baby and comfort a sensitive child. In early infancy, that may mean rocking and consoling. In later infancy it may also include redirecting and soothing.

In time, your child will learn to comfort himself, develop self-control, and understand what peace looks like in practical terms. But for now, you'll set the stage for emotional health by modeling a godly approach to emotions and by offering comfort when your baby is upset. Your responsiveness to your baby's emotions will become the precursor of your child's development of emotional management and seeking God for comfort.

As you see emotions develop in your baby, take some time to reflect upon your own emotions as well. God has created you to be an emotional person. Emotions aren't bad, but they can be upsetting and dangerous if misused. If you struggle with anger, ask God to give you a greater understanding of self-control, peace, and forgiveness. You might want to memorize James 1:20 which says, "Man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires." That verse contains an important principle that parents can use for the rest of their parenting journey. The tendency to get angry is common, but if you're trying to help your child grow, then your anger is likely to get in the way.

If you tend to be anxious yourself, you might want to meditate on scriptures that talk about the value of trust and relying on God, especially when things are uncertain. For example, Psalm 56:1 says, “In God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?” reminding us that our primary objective is to trust in God not in the opinions of others.

It's not wrong to feel angry or anxious. It's what we do with that feeling that's so important. As you help your child learn to handle emotions well, you'll likely be reminded of strategies for your own emotions and one of the most important ones is to go to God for comfort.

When you model problem solving and provide comfort for your baby, you're introducing spiritual growth in the life of your infant. You don't have to wait until your child is a preschooler or in elementary school to teach about God. Right now you're the model that your baby sees every day and many of the things you do reflect God and become the basis for further spiritual development in the future.



Intellectual Development

During the first year your baby is growing fast. That growth isn't just physical, but intellectual, emotional, and spiritual as well. A baby is born with certain reflexes and instinctive behavior but it isn't long before some of those are replaced with the ability to reason and understand cause and effect.

Intellectual development is the ability to think, speak, and coordinate actions, thoughts, and beliefs. It involves memory, perception, and developing a knowledge base that acts as a filing system for further use. Sometimes it's difficult to know what's going on inside that little head but you can be assured that brain development is taking place at a rapid rate. Your baby will naturally advance quickly in this area and there are some things you can do to encourage that growth.

Some people think that babies come into the world as blank slates waiting for their environment to draw the pictures that will make them what they will become. But, as you watch your baby learn and grow, it won't take long for you to discover that God placed the necessary tools inside your infant to initiate and interact with the world in or-

der to discover, learn, and acquire knowledge. Babies have their own personalities when they exit the womb. It's part of the unique design of creation.

You may read books about what's normal in infant development but keep in mind that there is no average baby. He simply doesn't exist. So, it's your job to study your child and learn ways to stimulate growth that appeal to your baby's particular needs and desires.

During the first year a baby takes in data at an amazing rate and is learning the difference between self and the outside world. Colors, shapes, noises, smells, and feelings all contribute to a knowledge base that will be used for more development. As a parent you'll want to take this rapid growth into account as you offer multi-sensory experiences for your baby. Keep in mind that every new experience adds a new file folder of knowledge to the filing cabinet. The more files that exist in that filing system, the easier it'll be to draw on those experiences and build on them.

Provide stimulation with different sounds, colors, and textures to appeal to the senses. Many new and interesting stimuli are good, but also realize that certain repeated stimuli, such as the sound of a parent's voice, will provide security and order to a baby's understanding. Furthermore, balance stimulation with rest. Some babies react strongly to being overstimulated. In general, test out new experiences like the feel of water or sand to crawl around in, but then return to the comfort of sitting on a blanket to play with familiar toys.

You don't have to entertain your baby all the time. Keep in mind that solitary play can increase a baby's independence and self-concept because she doesn't have to always

rely on others in order to be happy.

Babies are programmed by God to learn and grow. They naturally develop language and their curiosity drives them forward to learn new things. Frustration becomes a great teacher as your baby experiments with life. Discovering a bookshelf, a cupboard, or how to make noise by banging a cup on the table are all learning experiences for a baby on the move. Although some of your baby's newfound skills may be annoying or irritating to you, keep in mind that they are learning experiences. If you want to change the activity, offer something more attractive to your baby and make the irritating activity disappear.

Think in terms of the five senses. Provide stimulation for hearing, taste, seeing, smelling, and touch. Normal activities and interaction are learning experiences for your baby. In fact, God instructed the Israelites to use the everyday activities of life to teach godly principles to children. Deuteronomy 6:6-9 says, "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates." God knew that learning takes place in the common areas of life and spiritual growth is best accomplished by integrating it into everyday experiences.

Language development is critical to intellectual growth. Your monologue about life as you and your baby travel around the house or get into the car or meet some new friends is a great help for vocabulary development and increasing knowledge of the world. You can boost your

baby's intellectual growth by talking, playing music, and reading to your baby.

Remember that one of the ways babies learn is through play. Find alternatives to the television that involve active learning. When your baby can move around a bit, sitting her on a blanket with several toys just out of reach may keep your baby entertained and growing. Seeing those toys and moving toward them is part of developing motivation, solving problems, and taking initiative. Manipulating blocks, putting things in their mouths, and interacting with another person all provide babies with opportunities for enjoyment and learning.

Interaction during these times is important. When you discover that your baby is playing with a dirty shoe, getting ready to put a bug in his mouth, or about to pull a chair over, react quickly but calmly. Remember, if you're continually getting upset with your baby, you're adding messages to his experience base. You don't want your child to view you as an explosive adult ruining his fun. Babies pick up emotional cues from their environment. Even your reactions to life circumstances provide training for your baby.

As you watch your infant grow and develop no doubt you'll spend a lot of time in amazement. It's fascinating to see how God designed the human brain. Remember, though, to focus not only on knowledge acquisition but also on the heart of your child. God is interested in that heart and helping a child experience life often provides them with opportunities to develop heart qualities such as trust and a sense of security.



Spiritual Development

Babies are developing spiritually from the very beginning. Don't make the mistake of thinking that spiritual development starts when they're older. Right now you're contributing to your baby's spiritual growth. Foundational to the human experience is the need to trust. God has placed that need in each of our hearts and as we continue to give over parts of our lives to God, trust develops. The process starts in infancy.

The very first days, weeks, months, and years of a person's life are formational and will impact the rest of life. Learning to trust is at the heart of what you're teaching your baby right now. Your responsiveness to her needs and gentle, loving care provide your baby with the foundation for trust to develop. Your baby is totally dependent on you for everything, and all the things you do to nurture her contribute to the trust factor inside her heart.

Sometimes new parents start too early to try to discipline their baby, hoping to develop authority in the home early. Be careful of this mentality and recognize that your responsiveness is actually building a foundation upon which you'll build for years to come. There will be

plenty of opportunity to teach your child responsiveness to authority later. Right now, work on the needs of this developmental stage. You'll make parenting shifts at each stage in order to be most effective in responding to those developmental needs.

2 Peter 1:5-7 illustrates the building blocks of spiritual development. Although he's speaking to adults, you'll certainly see parallels with your own child's growth over the years. Peter says, "For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love."

Notice that spiritual growth starts with faith, the exact same place that infants begin. Then comes goodness, a quality that children will learn soon enough. As a child grows he'll learn the difference between what's right and what's wrong, in part because of loving parents who set appropriate limits. Knowledge and self-control are added next and then come perseverance, godliness, mutual affection, and love. Wow, that's a great line-up for parents to consider as they're raising their children over the years.

But notice that it all starts with faith. And in the same way an adult must learn to trust God, your baby is learning to trust you. The things you do now to comfort and love your baby will not only build a trust relationship with you, but will also set the stage for general trust of others and then specific trust of God.

As you care for your baby every day, pray with and for him. Ask God to do the inner work inside his heart and give you wisdom to know how best to nurture trust so that your baby will grow up with the ability to trust the Lord

for himself. Singing worship songs can also be a significant connection with your baby. Don't worry about the quality of your singing voice. Remember that your voice is one of the sweetest and most comforting sounds to your baby.

As your baby gets a bit older you'll start reading a picture Bible, telling Bible stories, and contributing to the knowledge base of God and his love. At the youngest ages, however, you're communicating experientially in ways that will contribute to a life-long pattern of giving and receiving love from God.

One of the realities of life is that pain is inevitable. Babies experience pain on a regular basis and must develop a response to cope with it. Some babies react with anger or even anxiety with the discomfort they feel. The healthiest response to pain is a desire to be comforted instead of reacting with anger. God is the best comforter of all. As you comfort your baby, you're demonstrating godliness and modeling the way that our loving heavenly Father cares for us. Your care and nurture can contribute to a healthy pattern of looking for comfort instead of reacting with anger to the pain of life.

Of course, as your baby grows, she'll learn more about how that comfort is best received. At the early stages in your baby's spiritual development you want to provide a nurturing environment where your baby can learn what comfort is through the positive relationship with you.

It's interesting that God uses the picture of the parent/child dynamic to describe the kind of relationship he wants to have with all people. Some important things happen between you and your baby that set the stage for a much bigger and deeper relationship with God.

It's an awesome responsibility to know that you're do-

ing work to contribute to the spiritual formation of your child. God has given parents a unique and special task, one that none of us are truly able to master. There are no perfect parents. God gives children imperfect parents so that someday they'll long for the perfect parent, our heavenly Father. He's the perfect parent that we all need and even if you feel like your parents made significant mistakes, you can overcome them with God's grace and a personal relationship with him.

It's that same personal relationship that you'll share with your growing child someday. For now, you're just preparing the foundation. Spiritual development doesn't begin later. It starts right now.



Pray for and with Your Baby

Prayer is an essential tool for parenting. It's not simply a good addition to your parenting ideas. It's got to be at the top of every parent's priority list. It can seem easy to rely on a parenting book or your own ingenuity to raise children, and those things will go a long way to help you. But sooner or later you come to a point where you recognize that you can only influence so much. The challenges of raising your child will exceed your wisdom.

Furthermore, sometimes your current thinking may need some godly adjustment. With all of the ideas out there in parenting books and articles it's sometimes hard to know what will work best in your family. Regular time with the Lord will make you sensitive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit when you need to be a little more firm on the one hand or patient on the other, or when and if you should initiate one of the important transitions such as dropping a feeding or moving from breastfeeding to a bottle.

God loves your baby. Parenting is a partnership between the God of the universe and parents and other caretakers to raise a child who is responsible and mature

and who loves the Lord. Take time to talk to the Lord every day about your baby and pray not only for your child but also for yourself. Parenting is the toughest job in the world and you need to learn a lot over the next few years to prepare you for the challenges you'll face.

You'll want to pray for the safety and health of your baby. But don't stop there. Pray for salvation for your child when he's able to understand more about what that means, and pray for a strong commitment to the Lord. Pray that God will develop the character and values as your baby grows like love, patience, self-control, perseverance, and graciousness. Pray that your baby will grow up to take a stand for what's right, and become an influencer of those around. Qualities like integrity, courage, and honesty are often formed throughout childhood, and your home is a laboratory where these things develop. Take time to even pray for your baby's future mate. It's likely that that special person is alive right now and growing up in a family.

If you have a hard time praying out loud, then now's the time to get over it. Don't allow lack of experience or personal discomfort to prevent you from moving forward in this area. An open, audible prayer life will help you for the rest of your life. Learning to pray out loud with your baby is a great way to get started to overcome your discomfort.

Don't just pray for your baby but also pray with your baby. As your child grows she'll learn that prayer is important by your example. Your child will even pick up on some of the same kinds of prayers that you pray.

Don't wait until your child can speak and then teach a rote prayer that's said before a meal or before bed. You want to pass on a living faith to your children. You want

them to know that you love God and that you talk to him regularly from your heart. As your children grow, they'll learn that prayer is a lifestyle and that you have a vibrant commitment to Jesus Christ.

Keep in mind that prayer doesn't require requests. In fact, your prayer may take the form of praise and thanksgiving. You may even want to sing songs of praise and worship the Lord with your baby. A child's love for God is often begun because of a parent's ongoing and transparent commitment to the Lord.

While you're praying, talk to the Lord about your own parenting. As you pray for patience, wisdom, and kindness, you'll see the Lord work in your own life as well. There's nothing in life that challenges a person's patience, sacrifice, and love like raising children. In fact one dad said it this way, "I had to make some major adjustments when I got married. I realized then that I was pretty self-focused. But that was nothing compared to raising children. I never knew how much selfishness I had to deal with."

Psalms 127 was written as a tribute to the family, describing the value of children and the importance of allowing God to build the home. Verses 3-5 say, "Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them."

The more you take time to thank the Lord and allow him to be the central theme of your home, the better opportunity your children will have to catch the importance of loving him for themselves. Who knows? You might even write a song of your own that you'll sing to your child on a regular basis. You might even want to write a special prayer to God that summarizes your hopes and dreams.

This prayer may be one you share with your child as he grows, or you may post it on the wall for others to see.

There's nothing like having children to develop one's prayer life. When children get sick or hurt or family situations become challenging, prayer often rises to the top of the to-do list. But there's so much more to prayer than a heavenly 911 call. You're passing on a spiritual heritage and modeling a lifestyle that will benefit your child forever.

A Spiritual Milestone— Dedicating Your Baby

Hannah longed to have a child but for whatever reason she and her husband couldn't get pregnant. She prayed often and eventually God granted her a beautiful baby boy she named Samuel. When Samuel was weaned, probably as a preschooler, she took the baby to Eli the priest and dedicated him to the Lord. She said in 1 Samuel 1:27-28, "I prayed for this child, and the LORD has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him to the LORD. For his whole life he will be given over to the LORD."

The story is a beautiful picture of Hannah's commitment to the Lord and her understanding that children are a gift from God. Following her example, many parents have chosen a specific time in their child's life to be a part of a child-dedication ceremony. Many churches encourage baby dedications and some even offer some type of introductory parenting class or Bible study to direct parents early on.

Dedication is a valuable spiritual milestone in the parenting process and in a child's life. Of course, you'll want

to thank the Lord regularly for the privilege of raising your baby. At times you might not feel too thankful when you're sleep deprived and your baby seems inconsolable because of sickness, teething, or worse yet, an unknown factor. But, in the end, the privilege of parenting is a gift from God.

Privilege comes with responsibility. All the work you'll do in parenting will likely end up being more important to you than your occupation or many of the hobbies you'll enjoy. You'll spend more time trying to solve problems, build relationship, and grow in knowledge and skills than you ever imagined. As you see the momentous task ahead, one of the greatest feelings is one of humility. You may have a lot of confidence at the moment, but eventually the complexity of raising a child will set in and you'll realize how much you don't really know. It happens to all parents. One of the greatest parenting tips we can give you is that you have a close, working relationship with your heavenly Father. God loves you and never gives you a task that's too great for you. He has the answers you'll need, and staying close to him will provide you with comfort when you're discouraged, conviction when you must change course, and guidance when you feel lost in the process. Recognizing that God loves you and wants to actively be involved in your life will help you draw close to him regularly.

All of this sense of awe and relationship with God results in greater commitment, gratitude, and personal dedication, leading many to want to publicly dedicate their babies to the Lord. Whether you participate in a public ceremony or not, you'll want to understand the value of a specific dedication time for your baby. First of all, it's a reminder to you of your commitment to the Lord in your parenting. But if you document the time with pictures, a written statement,

or a piece of art, a song, or a gift of some kind, it'll stand as a constant reminder for you and your child over the years.

Baby dedication doesn't provide salvation for an infant. Rather, it's a dedication of the parents to the Lord and a statement of their commitment to raise this child according to God's ways. That's not an easy task today so making a formal commitment to the Lord is helpful. Furthermore, when you participate in a public ceremony, it's a statement not only for you and your child but a commitment of that church to support you in the raising of your child, an important part of being connected to a church family.

Even if your spouse isn't on board or if you're a single parent, dedication is an important step. Your baby ultimately doesn't belong to you, but is a gift entrusted to you for a time. God loves your child more than you do and has a plan for your baby. If you continually remember that fact then you'll find your parenting will be much more satisfying. After all, you're partnering with the God of the universe to raise this child. Parenting is the most difficult job in the world and it's made a lot easier knowing that you have God to rely on along the way.

To make the dedication most meaningful, take time and prepare yourself for it. You may use some form of creativity by writing a prayer, a poem, a song, creating a video, or painting a picture, if God has given you those abilities. But most importantly, take time to dedicate your heart to the Lord. Mary wrote a song to the Lord when she was pregnant with Jesus. In Luke 1:46-48 she says, "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his

name.” Any mom can resonate with those beautiful words as she recognizes the gift of life growing inside her womb.

The dedication ceremony is only an outward picture of something that has taken place inside. You may tie a favorite verse from the Bible into this time in your life to be a continual reminder over the years.

At the dedication event, whether it is private or public, make the prayer time special. Choose people you value to pray for your baby and for you as parents. Ask God to give you grace to match the immense responsibility before you. And dedicate your heart to God with all the commitment necessary to rely on him first in all situations.

Create a reminder of the dedication. It may be as simple as a certificate of some kind or may include pictures, a video, or a personal letter you write to your baby. Whatever you do, realize that you’ll be able to go back to this moment in history and remember that commitment you’ve made. When things get tough and surprises make life unpredictable, you’ll have the reminder of your commitment to God as something to reflect on and provide encouragement.

Read Books to Your Baby

One great way to develop a baby's intelligence and offer a variety of learning experiences is to read picture books. Reading and enjoying books with your baby provides a number of benefits and is, in fact, one of the most valuable activities you can do with your children at any age.

You can read books to babies at any stage. Even infants love to hear the voice of a parent and your emotions and tonal changes as you read a story provide additional stimuli to a young growing baby that she wouldn't hear from you otherwise.

Children nine months and older add a new dimension because they can interact with you as you read, laughing, pointing, and taking interest in a book's colors and images. Through reading, babies gain experience with different sounds, rhythm, and language. The pictures provide new sensory experiences. The fun of asking a child where the bunny is or to point to the sun in the picture provides interaction between parent and child that encourages relationship along with learning. Reading to children is also soothing and comforting for them.

Many interactive books on the market provide opportunities for children to touch, feel, and turn pages, as well as listen, providing them with a multi-sensory experience. Reading to babies provides opportunities for them to learn about animals, foods, colors, and the world in which they live. It helps them develop vocabulary and imagination. And of course the benefit of sitting on Mom or Dad's lap for this focused time is priceless.

Take time to point to the pictures and talk about them. With older babies, nine to twelve months and beyond, you can even use one or two-word sentences. Point to the sun and say "Sun, hot," or to a duck and say, "Duck, quack quack." Eventually the child will be able to imitate you and see the picture and respond.

Sometimes parents think that reading to a baby is a waste of time because surely the child can't comprehend the information at such a young age. But think about how a baby learns. The effort of focusing on a picture book develops eye muscles and repetition of words combined with seeing pictures forms knowledge. Children learn from repetition. When you read to your child, point to pictures, and talk about the book, you're forming brain connections that provide the basis for intelligence.

One of the greatest benefits of reading aloud is the social dynamic between you and your child. Just hearing your voice and interacting with you about a book builds closeness. Reading to your baby over time strengthens the bonding experience and helps both dads and moms connect on an emotional level with their young children.

Some parents don't like reading out loud or don't feel as if they're good at it. Keep in mind that you don't have to be good at reading when you're working with a baby.

Just take it slowly. Starting during infancy can build good patterns for the future. In fact, when you recognize the benefits of reading to your children you'll want to get over any uncomfortable feelings you have. You may even use the reading times with your children to develop your abilities in this area.

As children grow beyond infancy and babyhood make sure that the reading time is fun. This isn't a boring time to sit still and be quiet, but an interactive time that's an enjoyable experience, sometimes even exciting, joyful, and packed with high energy. Other times it may be calm and quiet. In the end children obtain a love for reading and look forward to spending time with a good book. You might use different voices to represent various characters and take time to add a little drama to your interaction.

Of course the greatest book that could be read is the Bible. Choose a colorful "starter" Bible for babies and toddlers. Although you may tell Bible stories or read picture books of Bible characters with your kids, you'll eventually be introducing them to the scriptures as their guidebook for life. In the meantime you can be reading God's Word yourself. It's amazing what emotional connections happen in your relationship with God when you spend time reading his book. Eventually you'll want to tell your kids stories from the Bible, so this might be a good year for you to read through the whole Bible to get an overview, marking particular stories that you'd eventually like to share with your child.

So many children's Bibles are available today that you might want to read through the whole Bible once a year using a different Bible each year. In fact, a special gift of a Bible a year on one's birthday can provide a good reminder

of the importance of the scriptures for years to come.

Psalm 119:16 talks about the importance of God's Word. It says, "I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word." Your love for books, especially the Bible, is contagious. You want to pass that excitement on to your kids. In fact, over time, you'll use the scriptures in your training with your children. Psalm 119:9 says, "How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word." And two verses later it says, "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." The Bible isn't just for grownups. Developing a love for the Bible in yourself and your baby now will provide many opportunities for growth over the years.

It's never too early to start reading to your baby. Adults benefit from consistent Bible reading, so even reading a children's Bible will spark your interest and prompt you to read the story in your own Bible. It's all part of the reality that having children is a spiritual growth experience.

Let Your Baby Explore

Most babies learn to crawl at about seven to ten months, just after they're able to sit independently. By then the neck muscles have strengthened, and arms and legs have developed the ability to push the body off the floor. Some babies choose other ways to move themselves from one place to another, by shuffling their bottoms, rolling around the floor, or sliding on their stomachs. Even if a baby skips crawling altogether, the new mobility provides a way to explore the world.

At first you'll provide your baby with things to touch, taste, hold, see, and hear. It won't be long however before your baby is crawling, opening up a whole new means of exploration. In fact, crawling is one of the first real opportunities for independence in a child. Now your baby can maneuver over to the kitchen cabinets, under the coffee table, and even right out the door.

If possible, encourage crawling because the cross-coordination required to move one arm and the opposite leg forward at the same time and then alternate again develops integration between the right and left sides of the brain. You might put toys or objects in easy reach or create

an obstacle course with pillows to motivate your baby to crawl.

It's important at this point to baby-proof your house by putting locks on some cabinets, gates in doorways, inserting outlet covers, and generally cleaning the floor. Just take a look at the rooms your baby will crawl in and imagine the different safety issues that may need to be addressed. Be careful of things that might fall over if your baby grabs them, remove things that might break, and hide all electrical cords.

By baby-proofing your home you're allowing your child to freely travel around in his or her world and safely explore the environment. Bright colors may draw your baby's attention and music or particular toys may be of interest. Your baby is on an adventure, discovering new pieces of the world that were previously unknown. Encourage the exploration. Avoid saying "no" at every turn.

One of the factors for developing intelligence in a young child is the opportunity for a variety of different experiences. Allowing a child to crawl on grass, dirt, sand, carpet, and tile all contribute to the knowledge of different kinds of feelings. Listening to animal sounds, city sounds, music, and voices provides babies with the ability to differentiate noises. You can do the same with taste, smell, and visual experiences. Babies benefit from a lot of variety. In fact, you can increase a baby's intelligence by providing a variety of experiences and many different kinds of opportunities to interact with the environment.

From time to time you might use a playpen or a protective fence to limit your child but be careful to not overuse those parental conveniences. Furthermore, babies gain tremendous nurture from parents who carry them and hold

them a lot. But be careful to balance that nurture by giving your baby opportunity to explore the world.

Over the years your encouragement to try new things and explore the environment breeds a sense of confidence and a belief that the world is a fun place to learn and grow. You'll have plenty of time later to teach about the dangers of living in our world. Infancy isn't the time to emphasize limit setting. You'll need to do that in the next parenting stage.

One parenting strategy you'll use a lot in these early months is redirection and distraction. In fact, this is such a valuable parenting tool that you'll use it all through childhood including the teen years. When a baby gets too close to an undesirable area, you may entice her over to a safer place with an interesting toy or an attractive object. At times you may pick up your baby from one area and put him in another to redirect his attention. Redirection avoids confrontation and is a great tool for your parenting toolbox.

Pulling up to a stand and cruising along furniture adds a whole new dimension to exploration. When babies reach this stage, life changes again for parent and child. A standing infant can now reach things that he hadn't been able to touch before. It's at this stage that many babies begin to climb. Those legs are looking for exercise and curiosity gives them plenty of motivation. Many parents need to go around the house again and evaluate the safety issues to protect their baby. If you cleared the bottom shelf last month, now you'll have to clear the next one. Eventually you may feel like hanging everything from the ceiling! The reality is that infants who move should never be left alone. They find danger where you never imagined and climb higher than you ever thought possible.

Remember, the goal is to provide your baby with the

opportunity to explore in a safe environment. When you do, you're building confidence and a worldview that says that the world is a place to learn and grow.

When it comes to milestones in a baby's life, nothing beats watching a baby take those first steps. You can encourage walking by squatting down in front of your baby. Small steps of success provide delight for parent and baby during these times. Enjoy it. It won't be long before your baby is walking or even running away from you and you'll have to emphasize some limits. Learning how to walk is a fun growth experience that you can share together with your baby.

God encourages experiential learning. In Psalm 121 the psalmist emphasizes the parental nature of God who is always watching for our safety and care. Read this psalm from a parent's perspective and it'll have new meaning. Notice how God, like a loving parent, is providing safety and security for his children.

“I lift up my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD watches over you—the LORD is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD will keep you from all harm—he will watch over your life; the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.”

Take time and explore new areas of your spiritual life. God wants you to know him in the tough times and the good times, in the times of uncertainty, and the times when all your plans are working out. The spiritual life has so many

untraveled paths. Be sure to take time to get to know God and explore your spirituality with him. Remember that as you care for your baby you're teaching a valuable spiritual lesson by modeling the care of a loving heavenly parent.

The Use of the Word “No”

Babies need stimulation and a lot of it. They're growing and learning at a tremendous rate. God has given them a natural curiosity to motivate them to try new things. Part of your job as a parent is to nurture your baby's curiosity and desire to explore.

You'll often have opportunity to guide your baby's initiative and your goal is to channel the interest, rather than stifle it. Parents sometimes become irritated or afraid of their baby's curiosity and end up overusing the word “no” to try to limit forward progress.

It's not wrong to use the word “no” with a baby but some parents use it in every other sentence, reducing its effectiveness as a limit-setting tool. In fact, for some parents, it's more a cry of fear or frustration than a tool for guiding a baby forward. Choose your words carefully to encourage initiative and confidence instead of overemphasizing restriction at this stage in your child's development.

When babies begin to crawl, they often find their newfound independence empowering and God-given curiosity propels them forward. They want to hold, touch, and manipulate objects. They want to use their mobility

to transport themselves into places they haven't seen and that look rather interesting to them.

It's during this stage that babies can seem to get into dangerous spots quickly and you'll want to set limits. Don't assume that your baby is being mischievous or even rebellious when she actively explores even against your will. Children are learning a lot about life. Curiosity is high and babies learn through experience by touching and putting things in their mouths.

As much as possible, in this stage of development, use redirection and baby proofing to create an environment that doesn't require a lot of parental policing to protect from danger. Put interesting things in your baby's path to provide stimulation and satisfaction for curiosity.

Some minor limit setting may be helpful during this time so here are some suggestions to guide you in this important area. As your baby begins to understand the word "no," make your meaning clear. Sometimes your baby will look at you to get further clarification of your message. You say "no" as your baby reaches for the iPod and he pauses and looks at you before moving forward as if to ask permission or see if you'll react negatively.

Some parents infer rebellion from these learning experiences and are quick to react with intensity, presuming a rebellious heart. All of that drama isn't necessary. Simply say "no" and go over and remove your baby from the activity or take the object out of her hands. You're teaching an important lesson in those simple actions and resorting to further dramatics is rarely necessary.

Learning what the word "no" means and how to respond to it in various contexts isn't an easy skill, so you'll want to keep it simple at first. Surely you think you know what

the word “no” means but consider your baby’s perspective for a moment. Does “no” mean stop forward progress? Or, does it mean to turn around and come back? Or, maybe this time it means to stay in the same place but don’t reach for that item. Or maybe instead it means that you can play with that item but don’t put it in your mouth. It all may seem very clear to you, but don’t assume your child understands instantly.

You’ll likely want to use more words to emphasize your limit, but keep it simple. You might want to say, “No, don’t put it in your mouth” or “No, don’t touch” to make things more clear. Remember though that cognitive development takes time so practice will provide opportunities for your child to learn what you mean by “no” in practical terms. You might want to avoid the word “no” when possible to guide your child’s curiosity with positive terms. “Gentle,” “Stop,” or “Come to Daddy” may replace a “no” in order to introduce more terminology for redirection.

Just remember that curiosity isn’t rebellion. Misinterpreting normal growth as some form of defiance can lead both you and your baby into greater tension and frustration. When a baby discovers the pots and pans cupboard unlocked he may return there often to play with these large, loud toys. Or some babies consider the plastic container drawer a treasure, taking out all the pieces and putting them on the kitchen floor. Another child may empty the bottom shelf of the bookcase, enjoying the fun of pulling books off the shelf. These experiences, although annoying to a parent, are just fun activities for a baby and not to be viewed as malicious acts to defy or upset you.

Maintain a careful balance between being the policeman with your child and being the coach your baby needs

to be successful in life. That principle will be important for the rest of your child-raising days and it starts right here. Spend time on the floor playing with and enjoying your baby, encouraging the natural exploration.

When God provides instructions for us, his children, he not only tells us what things to avoid but also tells us what we can do instead. Too much focus on the negative leaves a person stifled and restricted. In Colossians 3:1-2, Paul is guiding the believers' growth and encouraging them to live a holy life. He mentions in the passage things they should avoid but also includes a very positive focus when he says, "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things." We can follow Paul's example of a positive approach to doing what's right.

Consider the words you use with your exploring infant. Plan your responses well. Don't just react to the new changes you're seeing but ask yourself important questions about what you want your child to learn and how your words communicate the right thing to do, with encouragement and affirmation a common part of your attitude and vocabulary.



Going Back to Work

One of the questions that's often on Mom's mind during the first year with her baby is if and when she should go back to work. This is often an emotion-filled question with many factors coming into play. For some the "if" is the bigger question, but for others it's just a matter of "when?" Either way, most moms wrestle with the issue on some level and at some time.

Women return to work for a variety of reasons. For some it's strictly a financial necessity. For others it has to do with keeping up with skills, maintaining a seniority position, enjoying the social and intellectual stimulation, or simply for the sheer enjoyment of the job.

If you feel compelled to go back to work for financial reasons, recognize that you may have more of a choice than you think. Couples who are accustomed to living on two incomes certainly have to make adjustments when one parent stops working. At first the adjustment is painful, but take time to evaluate the options. Some moms and dads find that they're willing and able to live on less income when exchanged for the added benefits of personally caring for their infant and being together as a family. Staying

home with your child allows for a more relaxed schedule, more spontaneity in your relationships, and simply more time together.

There are no right or wrong answers about returning to work, but you'll want to weigh out several factors in the decision-making process. If you plan to return during the first year, you'll want to make sure your baby becomes accustomed to drinking from a bottle. Infants who are exclusively breastfed for the first few months are often resistant to the bottle later on. If you want your baby to take a bottle at six months, it's best to introduce it within the first month and then keep an occasional bottle as part of the routine.

Another important issue, of course, is the question of whom to leave the baby with while you're at work. Some parents are able to adjust their work schedules in a way that allows one parent to always be home. This tag-team approach usually allows your child to stay in your home with all the comforts and familiarity it provides. Another way to preserve such consistency for your child is to have a caregiver come in while you're gone. This can work great too and often grandparents and other relatives are able to help.

Other options are home-based or work-based day care environments. If one of these choices seems best for you, you'll want to take time to visit the various facilities and talk with the staff. Questions to explore include the age span of the children in this care facility, what is the expected child-to-caregiver ratio, and how long have they been in business. You'll want to know about the daily schedule for the children, the availability of equipment for naps and playtime, what is the plan when a child is ill, and what are

their emergency procedures. Be sure to look around at the safety and cleanliness of the facility too and get some references from parents who use the service.

Compare a few options so you can see what's expected and what's provided. You may even want to stop by at various times of the day to evaluate the emotional climate of the staff and children. It's important to choose a facility that welcomes unexpected guests.

Once you've determined the right timing to return to work, and have chosen the caregiver, you'll want to practice leaving your child for short periods of time at first. Set up some scheduled outings that will be similar to when you return to work. Allow others to feed your child and put her down for a nap. This preparation will be as important for you as it is for your child. You want to recognize that although you're the best caregiver for your child, others can step in temporarily and be successful.

As you wrestle with the decision to return to work or stay home, be careful about the influences of other people. Although it's always good to get advice, and share concerns with others, the decision to return to work is ultimately up to you and your mate. No matter what your choice, some people will applaud your decision; others will question it. That's just part of the process. Remember too that this isn't a once-for-all decision. Family needs and situations change. Parents must be willing to demonstrate flexibility and sacrifice.

We're reminded in Ecclesiastes 3 that there is a time for everything and that seasons come and go. This is also true in the lives of parents. Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 tells us, "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to

plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing, a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.”

The choices you make as a mom or dad are for a season. You'll reevaluate them over time as situations and circumstances change. You'll want to be continually seeking the Lord for guidance about how to spend your time in this stage, where to set your priorities for these months and years, and then enjoy the moment. God has good things for you each day. Take some time to thank God for what he has for you today and the gifts that today provides.



Time to Wean

Weaning is a word that usually describes the process of removing a child from breastfeeding, but its general use can mean removing a dependence on other kinds of things including the bottle, a blankie, or a pacifier. Weaning can be a difficult experience for a parent, especially one who is eager to please and likes to avoid conflict. Sometimes it's just easier to keep breastfeeding even when you think it's in yours and your baby's best interest to stop. Recognizing the struggle on the part of the parent as well as the baby can help you make the adjustment.

Some babies wean themselves, but many require a period of adjustment. Weaning is a process, not an event, a long goodbye and a move toward independence. But weaning isn't the end to an intimate relationship between a mom and her baby. It just means that the way that intimacy is communicated is changing, replaced with social activities like rocking, holding, reading a book, or playing.

Deciding when to wean your baby is an individual decision and involves a number of factors. Many medical professionals recommend that breastfeeding continue for a year to gain the nurturing and nutritional benefits for your

baby. Since infants aren't ready for cow's milk until after a year, breastfeeding for at least that long avoids the need to introduce formula. But you need to determine what's best for you and your family.

When it's time to wean your baby, take it slow both for you and your child. You'll want to eliminate one feeding at a time, stretched out over several weeks, at least. This will allow your milk production to gradually decrease and allow your baby to adjust to the changes. Typically skipping a nursing time in the middle of the day first works best. It's easier to distract babies with activity, and they have the energy to get their nutrition in different ways. You might offer a cup or a bottle as an alternative, but expect disinterest at first. That's okay. You could offer a snack of solid foods if your baby tends to prefer that.

Typically the last nursing times to give up are the ones just before naptime and bedtime. As activities slow down to prepare for sleep, a soothing time at the breast may be a treasured experience for both Mom and baby. In fact some will keep these final feedings long after daytime nursing is over.

Breastfeeding often provides security for a baby so changes such as a move, busier schedule, or other stressful family changes may make it more difficult to stop. A child experiencing sickness may desire to nurse more often as comfort for the pain. Don't be afraid to take a step backwards to meet your baby's emotional needs for a time. But remember the simple principle of supply and demand. The more you nurse, the more milk you'll produce, and vice versa. As you breastfeed less, less milk will be available.

Although many babies wean themselves, given the

right distraction and supplements of a bottle and solid food, some babies want to hang in there for what may seem forever. This is partly a personality issue. Active, outgoing, curious babies may be easier to wean than those that are prone to savor the cuddling. So when it's time to stop nursing be sure to offer extra time to cuddle, hold, and rock your baby. Some babies have a hard time making the final step but your loving persistence will be just the key to make it work.

One mom said, "At fourteen months my son was still on two feedings, one in the morning and one at night. I went back to work when he was six months old and he adjusted pretty well then but the last two feedings were the hardest. It was tough for a few days. He seemed confused and struggled with the change, and that time was just as difficult for me. It wasn't long though before he became his happy self again and the breastfeeding was over. I now look for other special ways to relate to my son and we're off on what seems to be a new stage of our relationship."

Sometimes it's a work schedule, a planned vacation, or just life itself that makes weaning the best choice. As babies get older they may become more demanding about when they want to eat. This too can be a sign that it's time to stop the breast and offer a cup or bottle. One mom said, "When summer came and I started wearing a bathing suit, my baby felt welcome to grab for my breast in public. That was the day I knew it was time to wean!" This is an individual decision. So take some time to prepare yourself and your schedule. It's a milestone of sorts, so determine in your heart when the time is right.

Transitions like these often require some natural grieving as we let go of one stage to move into the next. When

you're ready to begin weaning, take time to reflect on God's comfort in your own life. Psalm 119:76-77 says, "May your unfailing love be my comfort, according to your promise to your servant. Let your compassion come to me that I may live, for your law is my delight." Life is hard work sometimes and God wants to comfort us as we do it. After all, comfort isn't just for kids. Every adult needs to learn how to receive comfort in a godly way.



Teething Torture

It's hard to care for a baby who is fussy, irritable, or even crying inconsolably. Teething is an inevitable process that may be the source of the problem. Although knowing this may not make the care any easier, it's helpful to know that the pain of incoming teeth may be the culprit.

Most babies cut their first teeth between the ages of four and seven months, with a full set of 20 primary teeth by age three. The permanent teeth won't begin to replace these primary teeth until approximately 6 years of age or later. Teeth break through one at a time over a period of months, and usually in an orderly fashion. First come the front bottom two teeth, then the top front two begin to emerge, followed by teeth along the sides and back. Remember these are just the baby teeth so although they may appear crooked at first they tend to straighten themselves out over time.

When babies begin to teethe they often become fussy. Since the symptoms of teething occur before the tooth actually appears, some parents panic because their baby is so upset, only to find a tooth come in a couple of days later, easing their anxiety. Sleep problems may become more

pronounced and babies may become generally more irritable when teething.

Teething babies often drool more and like to chew and suck more on toys and other objects. It's also not uncommon for parents to report that during teething a baby has a mild fever or loose stools. If these symptoms are mild, then teething can be blamed, but if the baby's temperature is over 100 or he is having several bouts of diarrhea a day, then illness is more likely the cause than teething. When babies are teething they also become more susceptible to getting sick since their resistance is down.

If your baby is teething you might provide a cold teething ring, a clean washcloth, or a hard teething cracker. Even a clean finger rubbed along the gum can provide some relief. An infant's bite isn't a sign of aggression. The baby is just relieving the pressure under the gums and chomping down brings some relief. That's why your baby seems intent on destroying the teething toy or a clean finger. It's just a way of relieving the discomfort.

If your baby's discomfort persists, some doctors recommend a small dose of infant pain reliever. Other teething products include topical anesthetics that you rub directly on the sore gums. These are designed specifically for teething infants and can be found at your local pharmacy. One of the most important things you can do for teething pain is to offer comfort to your baby. You may relax your plan for sleeping through the night or reduce a busy schedule simply to hold and care for your baby more during this time. The comfort of a mom or dad can go a long way to relieve some of the pain and discomfort your baby is experiencing.

Some moms view teething as the time to stop breast-

feeding. You don't have to stop although you'll need to teach your baby not to bite. You do this simply by withdrawing the breast when the child bites. The baby learns that biting stops the feeding. It's not necessary to inflict pain on a child who bites, as some have suggested. Your simple reaction of pulling away will provide the necessary teaching to stop the biting. The message the child eventually understands is that biting makes the process stop.

Teething does allow your child to eat more than liquid foods now. You'll enjoy providing new foods for your baby but be careful of large pieces of bread or hard foods like carrots that present a choking hazard. To start out, stick with foods that quickly get soft in the baby's mouth such as graham crackers or baby cookies.

To care for a baby's teeth don't allow her to suck on a bottle of juice or milk for long periods of time. That's like sucking on candy all day and it certainly isn't good for the mouth. You also want to avoid putting a baby to bed with a bottle. If the child falls asleep with milk or juice in the mouth, then tooth decay will begin. Dentists like to see parents starting good habits of teeth brushing early so they even provide infant toothbrushes or suggest you gently wash the gums with a washcloth.

Working through the teething stage may interrupt your routine and generally be cause for a temporary adjustment in family life. However, teething is one of those things that will pass. You just have to work through it the best you can. It's in those tough times when we've done all we can do that love picks up the difference. You might take some time and read the psalms that provide comfort in the midst of difficulties in our own lives. God wants to help us through the struggles and many of our adult struggles take a bit of

time to work through.

The reality is that teething causes pain. It's one of those growing pains, however, that are necessary to move to the next stage. Although the pain hurts, it's a sign of growth. It reminds us that some pain is necessary in life in order to move forward. Your child will experience similar experiences all through life and your comfort, as a loving parent, is an integral part of the needed care.

In Psalm 46:1-3, the psalmist expresses trust in God even in the midst of the struggles of life. "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging." God loves each one of us and he promises protection and comfort for those who trust him, but not necessarily freedom from pain. God is primarily interested in our growth and sometimes difficulties must take place in order to get us to the next level in our lives.



Starting Solid Foods

At some point you'll introduce more than breast milk or formula to your baby. Knowing how and when can be confusing. A baby's digestive system needs time to mature, and breast milk or formula contains the nutrients necessary for several months. Most doctors recommend starting solid foods after six months of age. You may find though that your baby seems hungry for more before then.

Every baby is different and growth spurts are a regular part of development. You'll likely see at times that your baby requires more feedings, awakens more often at night, or seems to eat non-stop. Many parents report that this kind of growth spurt takes place between three and four months of age.

Although it may be tempting to start supplementing with some kind of baby food at this point, it's usually not necessary. By just feeding your baby more often for a week or two, you'll likely see things return to your normal feeding schedule.

Most infants should begin receiving some solid foods at about six months of age. A few spoonfuls of baby cereal will begin the adventure, but remember that the bulk of their

nutrition is still provided by the breast milk or formula. So start with a couple of teaspoons each evening for the first couple of days and then increase the quantity gradually as your baby is ready. Use a rubber-tipped spoon to prevent gum injury when the baby decides to chomp down on it.

Start slowly. Often children have a reaction to certain kinds of food, creating a rash or diarrhea, so introduce one food at a time as a test. Rice cereal is usually recommended as the place to start. It's gluten free and easy to digest. Mix in some breast milk or formula to make a rather watery consistency to start.

Pediatricians typically recommend offering one new food each week to see how your baby will tolerate it. Give that food each day, before introducing another one. If you start with rice cereal, then a few days later you can add a simple fruit. Baby food sold in stores is manufactured with a baby's digestive system in mind. The foods are simple, and are labeled according to their progression. Begin with stage one foods and then slowly advance to those that are more complicated to digest.

If you choose to make your own baby food, keep it simple and easy to digest. There's no need for salt or sugar in a baby's diet, just well cooked and strained foods to start.

The transition from sucking to eating off a spoon is challenging for most babies, so take it slow and enjoy your baby's new adventure. Typically infants are interested in solid food until they actually get it into their mouths. The coordination to swallow this newfound texture doesn't come easily. Since the tongue has an active role in sucking, and quite a different role in spoon-eating, you'll likely find your baby pushing the food back out instead of swallowing it. This is normal. It doesn't mean your baby doesn't like

the food; it just means that she needs more experience and time.

Spoon eating is a new skill that takes practice and perseverance to develop. Be patient. It's recommended that just a few spoons of food before a regular bottle or breastfeeding can start you and your baby on the right path. Eventually your baby will get the hang of the new way of eating, become accustomed to the new tastes, textures, and mechanics, and the solids will take on a more important role in nutrition. But for starting out, the breast or formula provides the important nutritional elements and the "experimental" solids are the new adventure offered when your baby is hungry.

As you feed your baby, use a separate spoon to remove a small serving from the serving dish or jar. Don't use the feeding spoon as the serving spoon since digestive juices remain on the feeding spoon and shouldn't be introduced back into the serving container. This is also a sanitation step to prevent bacteria from your baby's mouth from getting into the food that you store for later. If you do end up popping the lid and feeding your baby out of the jar, it's best to throw away what isn't used in that feeding rather than putting contaminated food in the refrigerator for another time.

Initially you may choose to spoon-feed your baby in the infant seat, but soon it'll be time to get a high chair. As you shop for it, keep in mind that you'll likely use it for two or three years as your baby grows. Feeding a baby in a high chair not only provides easier swallowing, but it also contributes to muscle tone and allows your baby to play on the tray with toys or small pieces of food like Cheerios. Be careful that the pieces of food are small and easily dissolv-

able to prevent choking.

Whenever possible include your baby at the family mealtimes. Even before six months a baby can be present at the meal in an infant seat or on your lap. Mealtimes will be an important social experience for the rest of your baby's life so enjoying that experience early is a good family practice.

Your baby's appetite will vary from one feeding to another and from one day to the next so don't try to feed a certain amount at a time. Let your baby help decide when she's done or wants more.

You'll want to continue giving breast milk or formula at least until your baby is one year old. Solid foods can't provide all the nutrients and digestible protein your baby needs in that first year. Once your baby is eating some solids, you may choose to introduce a Sippy cup as well. This is more for practice at first, and can contain breast milk or water. As you progress with your baby's food plan you'll want to start with semi-liquid cereals, and then add strained vegetables and fruits. The next step is well-chopped table food including meats. Try a variety of foods but if your baby turns away from a particular option, don't push. You'll have plenty of time in your baby's life to encourage new things. At this point you want eating to be a pleasant experience.

At first your baby will only eat solids once a day but by eight months old, most babies are eating solids three times a day. Continue to offer the solid foods first, while baby is most hungry, then a bottle or breastfeeding can follow. Most importantly, make mealtimes pleasant. This is an important principle at any age and right now is a good time to start.

Paul used this developmental milestone to describe the spiritual growth of the believer. He said in Hebrews 5:12, "In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!" As you feed your baby solids use it as a time to remind yourself of your own need to study God's Word and grow spiritually.



Playing with Your Baby

Children learn through play and it starts before they can even sit up. It's likely that your baby will provide a first smile by about three months, providing you with not only a developmental milestone, but also a social exchange that rings with delight.

In fact, it's that first smile that often motivates Dad and Mom to start playing with their baby, if for no other reason, than to see that smile again. Making funny faces, a surprised look, or a moving finger landing on the baby's nose can all produce a smile or even a giggle from a young baby.

Age-appropriate toys allow children to be successful in their learning experience. If the toy is above the developmental stage, the baby may toss it aside because the reward gained is insignificant.

Lots of different kinds of play encourage development of a baby's intelligence. Interactive and social games like peek-a-boo or laughing, talking, and interacting together teach babies how to relate to other people. Different textures, sounds, and colors appeal to the need for new experiences to add to a baby's internal data bank. Rattles, balls, cloth

books, mirrors, and other similar toys provide your baby with ways to control her world, learn cause and effect, and see how things work.

Be careful about the use of too much television. Although the visual stimulation may keep your baby occupied, the passive learning doesn't provide the best experience for intellectual growth and actually works against the learning experience. The simple gratification of watching instead of doing hinders a baby's desire to initiate, solve problems, and entertain self. It may seem helpful to distract a fussy baby with an educational video but it would be better to help that baby to learn other soothing strategies that involve interaction.

Play is a baby's work. It's through pleasant interaction that a young child gets in touch with new things and new interactions. God placed a natural sense of curiosity inside your child that motivates heart qualities such as initiative and perseverance. Play expands a baby's life experience and gives new and valuable information that will be used for future interaction and problem solving.

One favorite game that babies like to play is to throw a toy down from the high chair or car seat expecting you to pick it up. It's a way to interact with you, and babies quickly enjoy getting you involved in their fun. Parents usually tire of the game before the baby does and sometimes the baby can use other sounds or pointing to try to hook you back in. Some parents make the mistake of using this as a discipline time, saying "no" or trying to exert other kinds of firmness because they don't want to play the game anymore. Rather than turn the play into discipline, it's usually better to change the activity by taking the child out of the high chair or distracting your baby with a different

kind of experience.

Remember that a baby's attention span is quite short. You may be ready to enjoy a particular game for longer, or want to show your spouse something that your baby is learning, only to have your baby want to move on to the next thing and be unwilling to indulge you. Let it go and come back to that activity in a little while and you'll likely get the same reaction.

One of the best learning objects for a child at any age is you. Your baby will learn a lot from your interaction together, responding to your gestures, voice tone and inflection, facial expressions, and movement. Almost anything can bring a smile on a baby's face when Mom or Dad is involved. Use things that amuse your baby in order to have fun and produce enjoyable experiences.

As your baby begins to crawl, you'll take on the role of advisor and supporter, allowing her to explore her world. Encourage exploration within a safe environment. One mom said, "I took my eight-month-old baby out to the grass and he wouldn't put his feet down because it felt so strange. I placed him on a blanket and he went to the edge to explore the grass. After an hour or so, he saw the grass as his blanket and we then were exploring some of the other things in our yard."

Crawling babies are relentless explorers and their fun often involves finding new things to look at, touch, or experience. Almost any household item can become a toy so keep things safe and allow your baby to learn. The kitchen is full of fun toys. You might identify one low drawer that's safe and allow your infant to play in it. Pulling out washcloths, plastic food containers, or a wooden spoon can be delightful play for your baby.

Bathing, changing diapers, eating, sitting in the car seat, and going for a ride in the stroller are all potential play times. Of course, sometimes babies are uncomfortable and don't want to play, or don't particularly want to cooperate in the car seat or ride in the stroller. At those times you may just have to do what needs to get done and it isn't fun. That's life and another learning experience. But many times, the common daily activities can be turned into meaningful learning times. Always be ready to play and teach, and your baby will benefit greatly from it.

God encourage his children to explore him. In fact, many times we learn from experience as well. God says in Psalm 34:8, "Taste and see that the LORD is good." That's a great invitation for us to learn through experience about the goodness of God. In fact, having a baby is one of those special privileges designed by the Lord. Take time and thank him for his goodness to you.



Separation Anxiety

Most babies enter a stage in which they become upset with the prospect, or reality, of separating from Mom or Dad. This is normal and coincides with the cognitive developmental milestone called “object permanence.” The baby can now remember an object that was here a moment ago but is now gone. This new ability takes place at about nine months and so a baby that used to be okay going to strangers, now may get upset.

This stage usually is most intense between nine and twelve months of age, but can begin sooner, and often lasts longer. Separation anxiety can be just as upsetting for a parent as for the child, especially if you don't understand its developmental importance and the reality that it'll end before too long. One mom said, “My husband and I just wanted to go out to dinner and we left our baby in the hands of Grandma, but all through our evening I just kept seeing the crying baby that I left.”

Of course, a simple phone call would have helped this mom realize that after a few minutes their baby was calm and happy, but it's hard to get that departure picture out of your mind sometimes. The reality is that your baby is

quite attached to you. That isn't bad. It's a good thing and even is an indicator that the bonding process is working well.

There are a few things that you can do to make the separation process more manageable. You might want to start by leaving your baby with familiar people like family members or good friends that the baby already knows. Although the baby may still react, you know that the issue is mostly a separation issue from you and not just a fear of being with a stranger.

Sometimes a baby is so attached to Mom that he doesn't want to even be left with Dad or Grandma. In that case it might be a good idea for Mom to leave the baby for short periods of time in the capable hands of those other caregivers. Babies benefit from bonding with others so the work of separating may actually be beneficial for your baby.

Every once in a while you'll see a baby that is so easy-going that he'll go to anyone anytime without a complaint. Some babies are just more naturally independent than others. If your baby is experiencing trouble separating, first of all recognize that it's a healthy and natural developmental stage, and most babies adjust with time. There are some things you can do, however, to make the stage less painful. When it's time to leave, say goodbye to your baby and leave. It's amazing how often Mom has as much trouble separating as baby does. The prolonged goodbyes don't help either of you. Prepare ahead, make all the necessary preparations and give the necessary instructions, then say goodbye... and mean it. If you become overly concerned with the fact that you're leaving, then your anxiety is contagious.

Simply say something like, "Mommy is leaving for a while and I'll be back later." Don't make a big deal about

your departure. Keep it simple, clear, and emotionally light. Resist the desire to sneak out without saying goodbye in hopes that your baby won't notice. Although you may not see the upsetting moment, the sneakiness is counter-productive for your relationship in the end. Seeing you leave and seeing you come back are both important to the acceptance process.

After you leave, don't reappear to see how your baby is doing. It can take a caregiver several minutes to get your baby settled and calm. Your desire to see your baby happy may be the catalyst to start the whole separation process over again.

If you're leaving your baby in a new environment like a church nursery for example, you might agree with the attendant that you'll leave but if your baby is crying for more than 15 minutes that you'd like to be called. In some cases, adjusting to a new situation may take place over a period of sessions. You may also want to stay with your child for a period of time in order to help her gain some familiarity with the situation. Sometimes, however, a lingering parent increases the separation anxiety issues instead of relieving them. In many cases, leaving your baby in the hands of a loving caregiver is all that's needed for the baby to settle down and redirect attention to the new situation.

Another practice that can ease the pain of separation is to leave a familiar comfort item with your baby. That might be a special blanket, a pacifier, or a favorite toy. Allowing the caregiver to offer a favorite activity such as going for a stroller ride, or having a snack, can also help your baby accept your temporary absence.

To help move through this stage more quickly, you can work in conjunction with the cognitive development

by playing some separation games with your child. Peek-a-boo is one such game that a child may enjoy. Popping outside the bedroom door in a playful way using the words “Goodbye” and “Hello” can be fun as well. Both of these games teach a child that you’ll not only be gone but will also return.

Rita told us this story. “My baby was clingy and seemed genuinely terrified when I tried to leave her with a babysitter. So I just decided it wasn’t worth it. I don’t think I left my daughter with anyone until she was two years old. I now regret the fact that I didn’t work at it a little more. Having some time alone with my husband or just getting away myself would have helped me to be more effective as a mom.”

Although you want your baby to be happy, remember that happiness isn’t the only goal. Even at a young age you may be working to teach your baby the flexibility necessary to be with someone other than you. Even this further cements the trust you’re building since, in the end, you do return. Dealing with separation anxiety may take time and be traumatic for both you and your baby, but after considering the options you may decide that it’s in the best interest of your baby and your family to work on the ability to separate.

Of course, the fact that separation is hard is a testimony to the effective bonding that’s taking place. There’s something about a parent’s presence that consoles a child and provides an internal peace and confidence. When you feel anxious about certain activities or challenges of life, remember that your heavenly Father is always there. When the Israelites faced the prospect of entering the Promised Land, God wanted them to experience a confidence in him,

so he said, “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.” (Deuteronomy 31:6) It’s not just babies that need the comfort of a father or mother. We all need to learn to trust God, even when we can’t see him.

The baby stage is a time when they learn to trust, a valuable skill and a necessary component for future development. Guiding your baby through this developmental stage is important and work done here will produce significant benefits in future stages as well.



Sleep and Your Older Infant

Although there's a wide range of normal, a baby between the ages of nine and twelve months of age needs about fourteen hours of sleep each day and night. Many babies take two naps during the day throughout their first year. As your infant grows toward that first birthday you'll likely experience some changes in bedtime routines. Here are some suggestions that can make that transition a bit easier.

Remember that a number of factors can dramatically affect a baby's sleep patterns. Teething and sickness can increase or decrease the need and ability to sleep. Normal growth spurts can also require changes in the schedule. Although it's good to get into some kind of regular rhythm, don't become too rigid. Adjustments will be necessary as your baby continues to grow and develop.

You may determine that it's best for your baby to take a nap but he may not seem to want it. Don't let that deter you. If your baby is tired and cranky, do what you know is right and put him to bed in spite of the protests and crying. It usually only takes a few minutes for a tired, resistant baby to fall asleep. Although those minutes may seem like

hours to a compassionate parent, you know that a good nap will result in a better disposition and sunny attitude.

Although the early stages of infancy required that you adjust to your baby's sleep schedule, now is generally the time to help your older infant to begin to conform to a routine and pattern. A little more structure at this point in your baby's life is a good step to teach more independence.

A simple nap and bedtime routine is important for dealing with the resistance you might experience. Putting a child to bed awake and allowing that baby to learn to fall asleep on his own is important at this stage. It'll set good patterns for the future and also decrease the need to wake Mom or Dad at night. The child who can put himself to sleep, and back to sleep, is the child with happy parents! That's the goal, although it usually doesn't come without some practice and parental comfort to aid in the process.

Your baby is becoming increasingly aware of the surroundings, so guarding against environmental stimulation often becomes more important now. Some babies tend to kick off the covers and subsequently get cold. Blanket sleepers can help avoid this problem. Loud noise such as conversation or television from an adjoining room might interrupt sleep. You'll want to monitor the environment in order to adequately care for your baby. Your sensitivity to your baby's needs will help guide you to set up an appropriate environment for independent sleep.

Many babies develop an attachment to a comfort toy or blanket that provides an ability to self-soothe. This is common and can aid in independence at night. Don't worry now about an over-dependence on a favorite blanket or toy. You'll have opportunity to break the habit if it's a problem as your baby grows older. In fact, having that blanket

or pacifier only at bedtime can help in the sleep process. If you restrict those security items to the crib, that will both help with sleep issues and prevent dependence on that item during the day.

Most likely your one-year-old will still be sleeping in a crib. Be careful that the environment is safe, avoiding strings or other things that your baby might put around her neck. Also be careful about things your baby can reach from the crib such as window blinds or wall hangings. If your child is a climber, make sure you don't leave enough toys to pile up as stairs. You may even remove bumper pads to prevent them from being used as steps. If you do find that your baby is climbing out of the crib, it may be time to start using a bed with a removable side rail so your baby won't get hurt falling out of the crib.

Although you'll likely have your baby sleeping through the night, don't be surprised by regression along the way. Your baby might start waking up because of teething pain or some kind of sickness, but keep in mind that your baby's growing imagination may also contribute to waking up at night. Separation anxiety or nightmares may require your comfort. Your baby may put herself back to sleep so don't feel like you have to respond instantly. If you do go in, it's usually best to calmly and gently lay your baby down and rub her back for a few minutes, sing a song, pray, or just be present to provide the security necessary to fall back to sleep. Keep your visits brief, simple, and without a lot of dialogue, in order to foster independence.

When a one-year-old is resistant about bedtime, determine limits and stick to them. Decide how many times you'll retrieve a favorite toy thrown out of the crib or how many drinks of water are appropriate. Firm limits applied

to this kind of resistance are important when a baby is simply being demanding.

If your baby consistently wakes up too early in the morning, get some room-darkening blinds for the windows and put a few toys in the crib to keep your child busy when he awakens.

When you're up at night or trying to comfort a restless or upset baby, remember the words of Psalm 42:8, "By day the LORD directs his love, at night his song is with me—a prayer to the God of my life." God often speaks and comforts us in the night. Take time during those nighttime interruptions to experience God's love for you and try to pass that love on to your baby.



Food and Your Older Infant

Eating has more benefit than just nutrition for an older baby. It's playtime! And play means learning. Although mealtime can get messy, keep in mind that your baby is learning important lessons and the experience with food is half the fun.

Manipulating food with their developing hands is a normal and healthy activity for babies. Fine motor skills are developed as well as eye-hand coordination. Be careful not to spend too much time emphasizing manners or making a mealtime boring. Feeling mashed potatoes or squishing peas provides children with the ability to experiment with texture, color, taste, and their own coordination.

By the age of one, your baby has likely developed a pincer grasp, the ability to use the thumb and first finger in coordination to pick up something. This allows her to pick up small pieces of food for herself. Having reached this developmental milestone, your baby can now pick up Cheerios off the high chair tray, or small pieces of grapes or bananas.

The next step is to then get these small tasty treasures into the mouth. That takes some practice. Keep in mind

that the ability to chew and swallow isn't fully developed so make sure your baby can handle these foods without choking. For safety sake, it's best to confine eating to the high chair where you can keep a close eye on what's going in and what's being swallowed. In addition to the self-feeding, you'll still want to feed with a spoon to get most of the nutrition in your baby's mouth.

Here are some suggestions for making meal times neater without removing all the fun learning experiences food provides.

Offer small portions. Just put a few pieces of food on the tray with the baby's bowl on your table to refill when your baby is ready. When you feed with a spoon, put something in your baby's hands like a baby spoon or Sippy cup. Your child won't develop the coordination to use a spoon until around two years of age. More likely he'll use the utensil to bang like a drum.

Distraction is a favorite trick by talking and playing. What baby doesn't enjoy playing the motorboat game or the airplane game as the food finds its home in the baby's mouth!

Know when your baby is done or needs to take a break from eating. Spitting out food or a desire to play with the food and not eat it are the telltale signs that the meal is over. One mom said, "When the food flinging begins, the meal ends." At that point you may switch from food on the high chair tray to toys since your baby is more interested in playing than eating anyway.

Don't expect a child to sit at the table as long as you do. Although eating together as a family is a great idea, a baby's attention span is quite short and it may be best for

your baby and the rest of the family to allow him to get down and play nearby. As he gets older he'll be able to enjoy the social component of the meal for longer periods of time.

Although it can be quite funny to watch a baby eat, be careful not to encourage an encore by your laughter. When a baby knows that he's getting your attention by throwing food, he's likely to repeat the activity. Throwing food is a great way to test out the new coordination skills but it's also fun to watch those big people laugh, yell, complain, and react to the experience. There's a time to make mealtime fun, but be careful that you don't encourage your baby to develop habits that will take a long time to undo.

Keep in mind that babies go through growth spurts and you might find your infant less hungry or more hungry for days or even weeks at a time. Don't force your child to eat at any age. It's better to provide healthy food choices during and between meals and allow your baby's normal appetite to motivate eating.

If your child is a picky eater you may want to use this stage to introduce new foods. Because babies like to put things into their mouths and like to imitate their parents, you may find this stage to be a little easier to get your child to try something new. Introduce a new food several times. Your baby may need to experience that food fifteen times before accepting it as part of her diet. Offer a variety of tastes, colors, and textures. Fresh fruits and vegetables come in many different forms. Fish, beans, and various prepared salads are great foods to introduce at this age. When your baby refuses to eat certain things, don't make a big deal about it. Just return to it in a few weeks for another try.

Avoid giving your baby non-nutritious food. The only beverages a child really needs are breast milk or formula (and later milk) and water. Introducing juice may add variety, but the high sugar and low nutritional value set you up for trouble. Pediatricians suggest four ounces of juice or less per day. You can also hold off on non-nutritious snacks. The extra calories without nutrients are unnecessary and again set unhelpful patterns.

Other good habits and rules of thumb include keeping a few snacks in the diaper bag for emergencies, maybe a plastic cup of Cheerios or a Ziploc bag of graham crackers. Having a bottle of water handy is also a good strategy. Don't allow your growing child to take a bottle to bed or fall asleep while drinking. Allowing the beverage to sit in the mouth is likely to begin tooth decay.

As your baby develops teeth, be sure to wipe them off with a damp clean cloth as part of the nighttime routine. This is the precursor to brushing teeth and will keep your baby's mouth healthy.

Remember that good nutrition is important as well as enjoying the social component of mealtimes. If you balance these two things your baby will gain a lot from the eating experiences in your home.

Eating and sharing meals together is an important part of Christian fellowship, but no meal is more important or will be enjoyed more than the Wedding Supper of the Lamb. In Revelation 19:9 we read, "Then the angel said to me, 'Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!' " Eating is an important social experience today and for the future. Now is a great time to begin good habits of eating and strengthening relationships at the meal.



Crying and Your Older Infant

Babies act out or cry as a way of coping with stress. To help a crying baby, first try to determine why she's crying. It may be due to hunger, pain, sickness, boredom, frustration, or some kind of anxiety. Maybe she's going through a growth spurt and needs more to eat than normal. It could be that she has an earache or some other kind of illness. Check to see if your baby is cold or hot or if the clothing is somehow bothering her. Provide some stimulation that's different to see if you can offset the boredom. Maybe your baby needs some extra sleep or is developing a diaper rash.

The list of reasons a baby cries is so long that you may have to do some detective work to find the cause. You may not find out for several hours why your baby was crying when another symptom develops like a fever or she just goes to sleep because she was tired.

If you can determine a cause on your own, then you can try to comfort your baby or address the problem. If the crying is abnormal or extended and you can't find a reason for it, don't hesitate to get medical help.

The way that parents respond to crying changes as

their infant grows. In the early stages of infancy it's best for parents to respond to the cries and solve the problems. As infants develop, their crying has different dimensions. It's still good to solve the basic needs and comfort when possible, but now your baby's development causes desires that sometimes aren't the best. It's important to know the difference.

Sometimes your baby will be frustrated and cry because she can't have something she wants or doesn't like what's going on. You may have to put your baby in the high chair to eat, the car seat to travel, or to bed because it's bedtime. In those cases, look for ways to distract your baby. If your infant doesn't want to get dressed, try to make it a game or provide a toy to play with while you put each leg into her pants. You might give her some small bits of food in her car seat or sing a song when it's time to go. Distraction is a great tool for a baby because the attention span is short and babies become easily amused with new things. There'll be plenty of opportunity to use reason with your child in later stages. Now, however, distraction often accomplishes the goal.

With frustration crying in particular remember that your goal isn't always to please your baby and make her happy. Sometimes she must learn to fit into your schedule or do the things necessary in life. A parent who over-emphasizes a child's happiness ends up feeding him junk food, not putting him in a car seat, and developing poor schedule routines regarding bedtimes and naptimes. Crying is sometimes a way for a baby to release frustration and come to a point of acceptance of something new.

Knowing the difference between frustration crying and other issues is important. Some parents, in an attempt

to establish control in their home, allow babies to cry at times when care and comfort are really most important. Determining the cause of the crying can help you know the difference. Even when you're being firm about sitting in a car seat or refusing to allow a child into an unsafe cupboard, you don't have to take on a harsh tone. You can be firm and loving at the same time, an important mix of qualities for any parent.

Almost all parents find their baby's crying to be stressful. If that crying becomes overwhelming, put your baby in a safe place like a crib or playpen and go into the other room, take some deep breaths, or take a shower to calm down. You may even call over a friend to give you a break for a bit. Your baby needs you, so keeping yourself emotionally healthy is important. You're stronger than you think and God pours his spiritual resources into you as you ask for them and receive them.

Take a few moments and meditate on James 1:2-5, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you."

That passage reveals some very important lessons about life. First of all, suffering and struggles aren't necessarily bad. They teach us and help us to develop perseverance. Babies are learning the same thing. Although you don't want to inflict suffering on your child, you do want to help your baby learn to cope with it. Sometimes that means we just do what we have to do. Other times it means that we

stop and slow down or offer comfort. Which of those you choose requires wisdom. That's why the remainder of that passage talks about how to get wisdom. Spend time talking to God regularly about your baby. You'll be surprised at the answers he'll provide.

God uses the family to be a place to learn and grow. He'll not only teach your baby important things about life but he also teaches you the perseverance and character you need to be the parent God wants you to be.



It's Just the Beginning

Parenting is a journey that takes place one step at a time and meanders through all kinds of experiences and challenges. Most seasoned parents would say that parenting has dramatically affected who they are as people, some finding it much more difficult than they ever imagined.

As you begin this journey of parenting we want to give you some advice. We've studied the process and task of parenting for many years, working with our own children that are now grown and with tens of thousands of other families. We want to give you some strategies that will help you for years to come.

We want to encourage you to set good patterns, develop skills, and learn the most effective ways to raise your child. That's not easy but then it's not impossible either. Your hard work now can go a long way to help you develop a firm foundation upon which you'll build over the years. Those habits and routines start now. Here are a few that you'll want to keep in mind.

First, remember that every child is unique. Just because you read about a strategy in a parenting program or

hear a friend tell you about something that worked, doesn't mean that it'll work for you. There are a lot of good ways to raise children. You'll have to seek the Lord and ask him to help you know what's best for you and your child.

Second, use the scriptures as a guidebook for life. God teaches us through his Word and helps us understand ourselves, others, and his plan for effective living. Learning how to think biblically about life takes work and keeps you growing in your personal development as well as your parenting and relational skills.

Third, always keep the heart in mind as you make parenting choices. Lots of things are in the heart including emotions, convictions, beliefs, thoughts, and the wrestling with life that we all do. Channel your parenting to maximize heart change, not just behavior change. We know that may seem a bit advanced when your baby spends most of the time sleeping right now, but thinking about it at this stage will set good patterns as you have opportunities to make choices along the way.

Jesus taught a lot about the heart. He said in Luke 6:45, "For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks." In Matthew 6:21 he said, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." The heart becomes this central place where values are established and responses flow. Your parenting is a tool for heart change in your child. Your choice of words, your response or lack of it, your emotion, and your teaching all contribute to your child's growth and development on a heart level.

Good parenting is all about relying on God's grace and adding as much strategy as you can muster. The temptation to react to situations will be strong at times, but rarely do instant reactions contribute much to a good strategy.

Take time to plan and think and brainstorm about the kind of parent God wants you to be. As you determine in your own heart the values and convictions you want to have, God will give you wisdom to implement them.

Lastly remember that you don't have to be perfect to raise a child. You'll make mistakes. It's not so much the absence of mistakes that will help you move forward but the willingness to learn and grow from them. Over the years your child will watch you respond to your failures as well as learn from your strengths. Develop good patterns of humility, confession, and reconciliation with those around you to strengthen your child's ability to do the same over the years.

You may think that this advice is coming too early. After all, you're simply trying to get a good night's sleep and get your baby on some kind of schedule. It's never too early, however, to plan ahead. Enjoy the present. It's a great time of parenting and keep an eye on the future to be ready for what's yet to come.

If you find challenges along the way, either now or later, know that others have gone before you. There are solutions. They often take work, but God never takes you on a journey without providing you the luggage to match the challenges. Trust in the Lord and let him work in and through you as you continue to do one of the most blessed jobs in the world: raising a child.

Parenting is Heart Work

Learn what it means to touch a child's heart. This practical, biblical resource will change the way parents view their role. You'll learn how to help children make long-term changes. Many times parents have to change the way they parent in order for children to change the way they live.

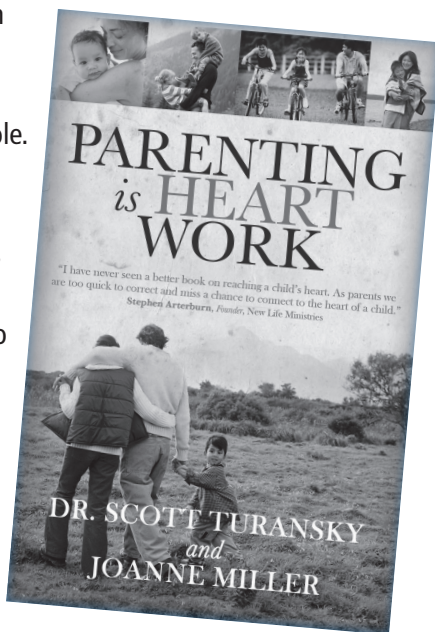
Offering a new way to look at parenting,

Dr. Scott Turansky and Joanne Miller, RN, BSN

share the results of their

study of over 750 times the

word "heart" is used in the Bible. Giving practical application, relevant illustrations, and many helpful suggestions, Parenting is Heart Work will help you understand what the heart is and how you can mold and direct the heart of your child. Over 50 ministry leaders, Christian psychologists, and pastors endorsed this book before it was even released. AWANA purchased 5000 copies for their parent-training programs. Learn how you can help your kids make lasting changes. It's all about the heart.



76 Hopatcong Drive, Lawrenceville, NJ 08648-4136

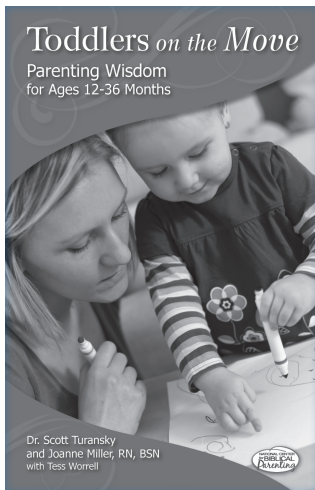
Phone: (609) 771-8002

Order online at: biblicalparenting.org

ParentingShifts

The eBook Series to Guide You in Your Parenting Through the Years
Book 3: Toddlers on the Move

Guide Your Toddler's Desire for Control and a Whole New World Opens Up!



By Dr. Scott Turansky
and Joanne Miller, RN, BSN
with Tess Worrell

*Available in print and also
as an eBook*

Toddlers on the Move: Parenting Wisdom for Ages 12-36 Months

An important parenting shift takes place between infancy and the toddler stage. You don't want to miss it. Knowing how to help your child between ages 12 months and 36 months is very important. After all, their brains are developing fast and their hearts are forming tendencies that will impact later development.

This book will help you understand more about the toddler experience and how best to parent during those years. You'll receive practical advice about eating, sleeping, discipline, and the social development of your child.

As you use this book to work with your toddler you'll not only find strategies for your parenting, but you'll use the scriptures to keep your heart focused on the Lord.



76 Hopatcong Drive, Lawrenceville, NJ 08648-4136
Phone: (609) 771-8002
Order online at: biblicalparenting.org

Free E-mail Parenting Tips



Receive guidance and inspiration a couple of times a week in your inbox. Free Parenting Tips give practical suggestions to help you relate better to your kids and help your kids change their hearts, not just their behavior.

The National Center for Biblical Parenting is here to help you. Visit biblicalparenting.info and sign up today for Free E-mail Parenting Tips, available in English and Spanish. While you're there, discover other great resources for parents.



76 Hopatcong Drive, Lawrenceville, NJ 08648-4136

Phone: (609) 771-8002

E-mail: parent@biblicalparenting.org

Web: biblicalparenting.org

The Baby *Adventure*: Parenting Wisdom for Birth to 12 Months

In this book you'll learn that babies need to develop two primary heart qualities during their infant years: trust and a sense of security. Learn about the bonding experience that benefits both you and your baby. You'll also enjoy the practical advice for sleeping, eating, playing, and even spiritual formation of your baby. Don't miss these valuable truths to help you understand your developing infant. The scripture passages will inspire you and guide you throughout your parenting journey.



Dr. Scott Turansky and **Joanne Miller, RN, BSN** are the founders of the National Center for Biblical Parenting. Joanne is a pediatric nurse and enjoys helping parents start out well with their new babies. Her combined experience professionally and her understanding of the heart from a biblical perspective make her advice particularly valuable.



Dr. Scott Turansky



Joanne Miller
RN, BSN



biblicalparenting.info



biblicalparentinguniversity.com

ISBN 978-1-888685-48-0
\$14.99
5 1 4 9 9 >



9 781888 685480

One of the books in the Parenting Shifts Series.