

Tips for Parents

(excerpted from the book, *From Conception to Crawling*, by Annie Brook)

Developmental Movement: Foundations for Growth

As you watch your infant struggle to roll or crawl, have you ever wondered what is the best way to help them? Years of study of the developmental patterns common to most infants have given us some good ideas for you. Recently a group of Body-Mind Centering® Practitioners and mothers trained extensively in developmental patterning were asked, "What are simple things parents can do to support their child's motor development?" Here are some of their answers.

Be on the floor with your baby and stay on their physical level as much as possible

If you can't be on the floor, keep your infant on a high bed or push a table in a corner and make a place for them there. Have your face at their level, engage in eye contact and hold their belly to your belly when nursing. Support their feet when nursing.

Verbally engage with your child without asking them questions

Please don't ask your child or baby questions. Use statements instead. Often well meaning adults will ask infants and children how they are, or what they are doing, or if they want to come with Mother? This overactivates the high brain. It is better simply to notice them, such as "it is so good to see you!" Or to praise them, and to use statements, such as "we are going to the store now."

Keep your children as clothing-free as they feel comfortable.

One mother has a small room her family calls the 'Club Med' because it is kept warm year round. Expose your child's skin to different sensations and temperatures. Brush their skin with different textures such as feathers, soft cloth, and rough things as well. This stimulates the proprioceptive nerves that affect balance and coordination.

Avoid shoes as much as possible

Stiff shoes often bind the toes and feet, reducing their flexibility. Developing a full range of toe coordination is vital in all movement. Let your babies and toddlers feed themselves. Let eating be an artistic food mess. This creative play helps to develop the hand-to-mouth reflexes that support grasping, reaching and receiving.

Bathe them after eating, not before

Let your toddler and infant get messy and play with their food. This encourages tactile and sensory motor integration and exploration.

Use soft small panties rather than bulky diapers. Bulky diapers can inhibit the development of the hip socket, causing a child to spread the legs too wide and torque the hip before the joint is fully formed.

Feed and hold your baby from both sides.

This helps both you and your baby to develop bisymmetry. When your toddler is walking, encourage bilateral awareness by giving him or her things to reach toward with both the right and left hands.

Learn to observe what is happening with young ones before interrupting them.

Notice whether they are learning something new. What looks like making a mess of the kitchen cupboards may be an experiment in sorting and stacking.

When your baby is first learning to move independently, do not interrupt. Often the baby is responding to an external stimulus that we are unaware of as he or she busily crawls toward a crumb on the floor. It is common to see mothers come up from behind and scoop up their babies. This can teach them patterns of interruption rather than patterns of completion. It also fosters the baby's inability to focus and follow through with tasks. When you must move your infant, simply tell the baby what you are about to do so they know what is happening and why.

Be aware of your child's abilities and stages of development.

When we sit or stand babies before their internal muscular support has developed, they learn to lock and brace the joints, especially in the legs and low back. Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, the founder of Body-Mind Centering®, speculates in her book, *Sensing, Feeling, and Action* that many adults' low-back problems stem from being sat up too early as babies. For normal muscular development, let your babies and toddlers find their own pathways to sitting and standing.

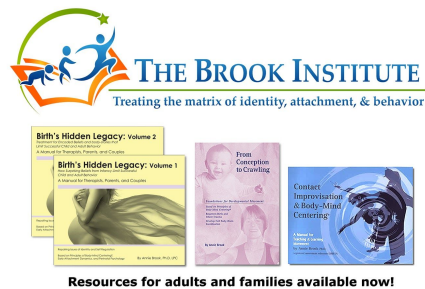
One new mother had adopted a premature baby when he was three weeks old. He had tight flexion in his muscles. His left thumb was closed inside his fist and his left eye closed. This mother brushed his hand and kissed his fingers and toes to help bring sensation and attention to his outer extremities. In just a few weeks, his left hand opened up and became much less contracted. From her Body-Mind Centering training, this mother knew the appropriate sequence of developmental reflexes to support and guide her baby's growth.

Lastly, listen to your baby.

Match their innate childlike qualities of attention and presence with yours. Look into their eyes to acknowledge their essence. Feel that place of wordless communication. This will help you both develop deeper levels of intimacy. It might take some practice to do this—parents often jump up at these moments and get busy. If we get too busy or too concerned with correct parenting we miss opportunities to foster spirit-to-spirit contact with our young ones.

Be Aware of Your Baby's Physical Development.

For more on developmental stages get my book, *The Developing Infant*. It shows all the developmental stages and what a baby should be capable of supporting in movement, based on months of age. For a guided practice in development, get my DVD set, *From Conception to Crawling*.



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