

PARENTING

two-gether

B I R T H T O 1 2 M O N T H S



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

PARENTING

two-gether

BIRTH TO 12 MONTHS



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

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CONGRATULATIONS!

YOU HAVE JUST BEGUN A WONDERFUL AND EXCITING JOURNEY CALLED PARENTHOOD.

Being a new parent,
your mind is
probably filled
with thoughts and
feelings . . . some
excited; some a little worried.
You might be saying to yourself:

*"I want him to be the
happiest baby in the world."*

"I want only the best for my baby."

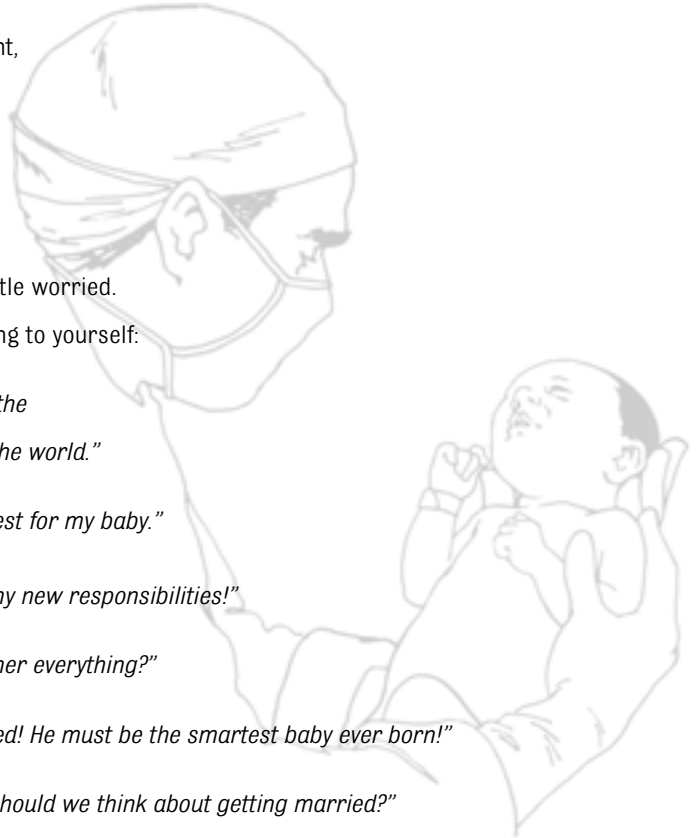
"There are so many new responsibilities!"

"How can I teach her everything?"

"He's so bright-eyed! He must be the smartest baby ever born!"

"What about us? Should we think about getting married?"

This booklet will help you with some of your questions and worries. You'll learn about the benefits of establishing legal fatherhood and why it's important to be involved in your child's life. You will find ideas for building a strong, loving connection to your child; steps you can take to strengthen your relationship with the other parent and information on establishing legal paternity; and the value of involved fathers.



Don't worry if you feel clueless right now. We'll be offering lots of useful thoughts and ideas. You'll find handy "PARENT TIPS" that give helpful hints about parenthood. They look like this:

Parent TIP

This is where you'll find ideas that will make your job as a parent easier.

Every now and then we're going to run into a technical word that may be unfamiliar to you. No problem. Just look for "What does this mean?"



What does this mean?

In these boxes we'll give you easy-to-understand definitions for tough words.

That's about it, so get ready to learn a few things, make a few mistakes , , , and become terrific parents!



Chapter 1-Newborn

THE FIRST THREE MONTHS

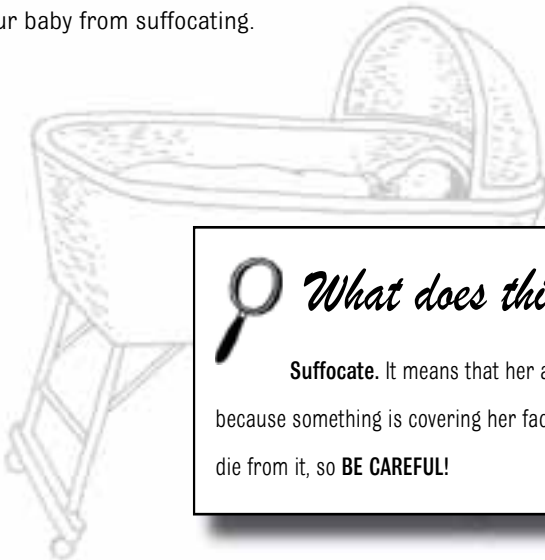
Sleeping-Dressing-Grooming

SLEEPING

During the first few months, your baby will sleep between 15 and 20 hours a day. Now is the time to start planning for a safe, quiet place for your baby to sleep.

IMPORTANT STUFF about putting baby to bed:

- **Never lay a baby on a pillow**, a soft couch, an adult bed or a water bed. Don't put toys, comforters, blankets or pillows in the crib when your baby is sleeping. Remembering this will help keep your baby from suffocating.



What does this mean?

Suffocate. It means that her air gets cut off because something is covering her face. She could die from it, so **BE CAREFUL!**

- **Always put your baby on her back** when she's sleeping . . . **not** on her stomach or side. If you just think to yourself, "Back . . . to Sleep" you'll get it right. Make up one that works for you. Babies who sleep on their backs are less likely to die of SIDS.
- If your baby is sleeping deeply, **wake her gently**. You may want to rub her hands and feet, stroke her face and change her diaper.



What does this mean?

What's SIDS? It stands for **Sudden Infant Death Syndrome**. Sometimes babies die all of a sudden, and the doctors don't know why. Babies who sleep on their stomachs face an increased risk of SIDS.

DRESSING

You will want to undress and re-dress your baby a little at a time so that she never has to be naked and get too cold. You can put a towel or light blanket over the baby's bare tummy. It will help her feel safe and calm.

GROOMING

All newborns have peeling, flaky skin. This is normal. Don't use lotion or oils on your baby to stop this. Fingernails need to be kept short. Use tiny, round-ended scissors and clip nails while the baby is sleeping. Infant-sized nail clippers are available. Don't put anything in the ears or nose. These places will take care of themselves. Just wipe around the outside. Never use Q-tips or cotton swabs. They can poke and do damage.

Diapering

Many babies like to be diapered. It means getting rid of that mess. Diapering is a perfect time to have some fun! To take your mind off the gross part, you can get in some tummy tickling, toe tweaking, and “This little piggy went to market”...ing. Your baby loves to hear your voice and look at your face . . . because he loves you. Talk to him about what you hope he’ll be like when he grows up. If you can’t think of anything to talk about, sing to him. He’ll love it all.

Parent TIP

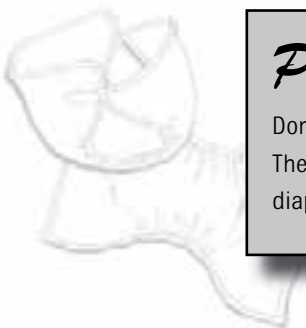
The truth is, not every baby likes to be diapered, and not every baby likes it every time. No problem. Drag out those toys and mobiles. His brain will get a chance to do some fun work while you’re doing the dirty work.

DIAPERING IS A CHANCE FOR MOM AND DAD TO FEEL CLOSER. That’s right. Taking turns sharing the diapering chore can take some of the pressure off Mom. She’s happier, he’s proud, and both of them feel closer.

“HOW OFTEN DO I CHANGE A DIAPER?” Your baby should be changed right after his diaper gets very wet or when he has soiled it. This is the best way to keep him from getting diaper rash.

“HOW DO I DO IT?”

- Gently lay the baby on a flat surface, like a changing table or bed. Always keep one hand on the baby and **never leave him alone on a changing table**. That little squirmer of yours could roll off in the blink of an eye!
- Take off the old diaper by pulling the adhesive tape tabs loose. Lift the baby by the feet and pull out the diaper.
- Wipe off any “leftovers” with a baby wipe or wash cloth. And don’t just wipe the easy parts; get him clean all over.
- Now for the lotion and baby powder, right? Maybe not. Powder can get into his lungs, and lotion can sometimes hurt a baby’s skin. Check with the doctor before using them.
- Cleaning the baby with wipes is usually all you need to do.
- Let’s wrap him up! Make sure your baby is lying on the back of the diaper (yes, there is a back and front). Cover him with the front of it, pull the adhesive tape tabs and fasten the diaper.
- Keep in mind: **too loose, they leak! too tight, they shriek!!**
- Leave enough room so that you can slide at least two fingers inside the diaper at the waist. That’s it. You’re done. Now go wash your hands.



Parent TIP

Don’t throw ordinary baby wipes into the toilet. They can clog it! Throw them into the baby’s diaper trash or make sure you buy flushable wipes.

Crying

CRYING IS NORMAL. Most babies cry for about two hours a day, and many get fussy toward the end of the day.

CRYING IS IMPORTANT. It's the only way a newborn can tell you she's uncomfortable and wants help. Are you ready for this? **NOBODY CAN MAKE A BABY STOP CRYING.** Not moms, not dads, not doctors, not baby experts—**NOBODY.**

BABIES STOP CRYING WHEN THEY'RE READY. So relax. Your job is not to make her stop. Your job is to show her that she lives in a terrific world full of people who care about what she needs. If you stay cool and treat her with care when she cries, she starts to learn how to communicate. The bond between you gets stronger. She starts to feel good about herself and her world.

MIX TOGETHER WAYS TO DEAL WITH CRYING.

Try mixing sounds, movement, touch and things for her to look at. One thing you could do is hold your baby and rub her back while you're walking around. You might even sing to her.

INVENT A NEW WAY.

The same thing doesn't always work every time or for every person. Don't just use somebody else's ideas. Try your own. If it doesn't work after about five minutes, try something else or add something to what you're doing. And keep trying!




















DON'T FEEL LIKE YOU'RE NOT A GOOD DAD OR MOM JUST BECAUSE YOUR BABY CRIES.

If you've done all you can do and just can't handle the baby's crying anymore, take a break! It's OK! Be proud that you did your best. Remember, every time you treat your baby calmly and with love you learn new things about what works and what doesn't.

STAY COOL. A baby's cry is one of nature's loudest sounds. It is as loud as a truck without a muffler—and that's almost enough to be painful! Babies cry for lots of different reasons. Always remember, it's more important to show your baby how much you love her and want to help her than to figure out exactly what makes her cry. If you've done everything you know to do and the baby is still crying, you may have to let her cry herself out. That's OK. Sometimes even babies don't know why they are crying.



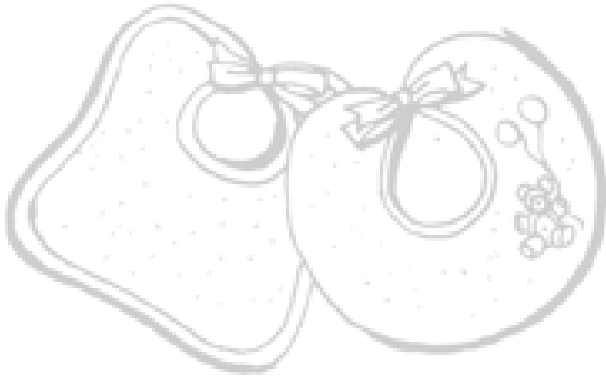
CRY CHART

CHECK FOR THIS	THEN	DO THIS
Wet/dirty diaper? No 	Yes 	Change diaper
Time to eat? No 	Yes 	Feed your baby
Uncomfortable? No 	Yes 	Pick her up and move her around. Check if hot or chilly. Adjust clothing. Check for diaper rash.
Gas bubble? No 	Yes 	Hold your baby to your shoulder. Walk around, gently stroking her back until she burps.
Bored/angry/wants to be held? No 	Yes 	Hold, hug, cuddle, kiss, tell stories, read, sing, show baby interesting pictures, go for a walk. Tell her you love her.
Tired? No 	Yes 	Gently rock your baby, telling her how much you love her or singing lullabies until she falls asleep.
Colic? No 	Yes 	Lie down and let your baby fall asleep lying on your chest. Be sure and hold her gently.
Sick? No 	Yes 	Check for fever. What are the symptoms? Call doctor.
Something unusual. Schedule change? Teething? Change in eating? Constipated? Unusual poop? 	Yes 	Hold, cuddle, gently talk to her. Let her know you will take care of her.
Nothing is working	Yes 	Sometimes your baby needs to cry. It's OK. You can show your love anyway.

Feeding

DID YOU KNOW THAT BREAST FEEDING IS HEALTHIER THAN FORMULA?

- Every mother makes milk that is custom-designed specifically for her baby.
- A mother's milk is loaded with live ingredients that protect her baby from the illnesses and infections he is exposed to. This means fewer trips to the doctor and more money left in your pocket.
- Breast-fed babies are also less likely to die of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) or develop diabetes, obesity, asthma and certain types of cancer as they grow older.
- Breast-fed babies tend to be smarter, too!
- Not only is breast feeding healthier for your baby, it's better for Mom. Breast feeding mothers tend to lose their pregnancy weight faster and have a reduced risk of osteoporosis and breast and ovarian cancer later in life.



“HOW DO I FEED THE BABY?”

Whenever you can, make feeding time your special time with your baby. It's a great time for bonding! Find a comfortable place where you can relax, hold him in your arms and look into his face. If you use a bottle to feed breast milk or formula, always hold the bottle. **Don't prop it up.** That could make him choke and have more ear infections.

Breast-fed babies should be brought to mom to feed at their first sign of hunger – such as sucking on hands or moving their lips and tongue. Formula-fed babies will take about two to four ounces six to eight times a day. They do not need any extra vitamins or foods unless the baby's doctor says they do. Babies should not be given cow's milk, soft drinks, tea, fruit juices, etc.

If you want to warm the bottle, set it upright in a pan of hot (not boiling) water for a few minutes. Always test the breast milk or formula by dripping some on your wrist to be sure it's not too hot. **Do not use a microwave oven to warm the bottle.** They don't heat things the same all the way through. Also, things keep cooking for a while after you take them out of a microwave, so the breast milk or formula could stay hot longer than you think.

If there's any breast milk or formula left over, throw it out. The germs from your baby's mouth will get into the milk in the bottle and could make your baby sick if you feed your baby that same milk later. Test your bottle nipples from time to time to make sure the right amount of breast milk or formula is coming out. It should be one drop at a time. Don't forget to burp the baby after every two ounces or whenever the baby acts uncomfortable.

“WHAT IF MOM CAN’T BREAST FEED FOR LONG?”

If for some reason you feel that you cannot breast feed, or if you want more information about breast feeding, please consult your physician or a lactation consultant or call the breast-feeding hotline 1-800-514-6667. Many Moms have to return to work when the baby is still young. Some Moms find they can pump at work, others can't. Even if Mom can't pump at work, she can still continue to breast feed the baby in the mornings, evenings, and weekends. Any amount of breast feeding will be good for both Mom and baby and will help the baby tolerate the formula.

If Mom has to return to work, she needs to start replacing one breast feeding a day with a bottle-feeding of expressed milk or formula about two weeks before her first day of work. By the time Mom returns to work, the baby will be getting bottles during work hours and still have the closeness of breast feeding when Mom is around.

“WHEN DOES MY BABY NEED OTHER FOODS?”

Your baby should have only breast milk or formula until he is at least four to six months old. No juice, tea, Kool-Aid, cow's milk or any solid foods, including cereal. The baby's doctor can tell you when it is time to start solid food.

Parent **TIP**

If Mom is breastfeeding and taking the baby to daycare for the first time, tell her to get down on the floor to play with the toys and hug the other children. Her milk will then make antibodies to protect the baby from bacteria in the daycare!

NEVER Shake A Baby!

Sometimes people don't know what to do when a baby won't stop crying and sometimes the only thing they can think to do is shake him. Does that make sense to you?

Check this out:

- Shaking hurts babies.
- Shaking scares babies.
- Shaking makes babies cry.

There is no way shaking a baby will ever make him stop crying. He will only cry harder. **SHAKING THE BABY DOES NOT WORK** and it's **VERY DANGEROUS!** Babies' necks are weak and their heads are heavy. Shaking a baby is like getting a whiplash in a car wreck. It will hurt his brain and spine. You might not even notice how bad it is for a long time. Doctors call it Shaken Baby Syndrome, and it's **EXTREMELY HARMFUL.**

Shaking a baby can cause bleeding in the brain, blindness, hearing loss, seizures, spinal cord injuries, cerebral palsy **AND EVEN DEATH!**

NEVER SHAKE A BABY!

Tell **anyone** that might babysit your baby about how bad **Shaken Baby Syndrome** is. If you know your baby has been shaken . . . or if you even **think** he may have been, take him to the Emergency Room or call 911.

Your child's health and safety

DON'T FORGET WELL CARE CHECKUPS.

Even if your baby is not sick, she needs to visit her doctor or clinic at least seven times in this first year. "SEVEN!?! Why so many times?"

She's growing and changing really quickly. When kids this age get sick it can be more serious than with older children. It's best to spot an illness early, before it turns into a full-blown nasty problem. At well care visits the doctor will:

- Check her for diseases,
- Give her the shots she needs to stay healthy,
- Check to see that her body and brain are growing like they should, and
- Answer questions about lots of things, like sleeping, crying, and when she can start eating solid food.

"HOW CAN I TELL IF MY BABY IS SICK?"

Look for things like:

- **Fever** — An infant has a fever when her rectal temperature (the temperature inside her bottom) is more than 100.5 degrees. Rectal thermometers are not the same as the ones you put in your mouth (thank goodness!).

There are two kinds:

1. **Mercury-filled.** These don't cost much, but they can be dangerous if they break. They are made of glass, and mercury inside is a poison;
2. **Digital.** These cost more but are much safer. They are made of plastic that bends—and they beep when they're done!

“How to” – Put a small amount of Vaseline on the rounded end of the thermometer and gently push it ONE INCH into the baby's rectum. Keep the thermometer in for about two minutes. Don't let it go. Be careful. Thermometers can poke her on the inside and hurt her.

GOOD NEWS! Here's another way to take your baby's temperature! A new kind of thermometer takes temperatures in the EAR or UNDERARM! They cost more than the others, but they're faster, they don't break like glass ones, and there's less chance of hurting the baby.

- **Excessive Crying** — Infants cry for lots of reasons. If your baby cries for a long time and nothing seems to help, he may be ill. Call his doctor.
- **Diarrhea** — If your baby's stool is more watery than usual, has blood in it, looks kind of greenish, or if she eliminates more often than usual, call her doctor.
- **Vomiting** — Vomiting is forceful; spitting up is gentle. If vomiting starts happening a lot or has blood or green gooey stuff in it, call her doctor.
- **Trouble Breathing** — If you hear breathing problems like wheezing, congestion or other unusual breathing call her doctor.

- **Low Energy** — If your baby shows a lack of energy, inactivity or is more sleepy than usual call her doctor.
- **Refusal to Eat** — A big change in eating habits may be a sign of illness. If your baby suddenly eats much less or refuses to eat at all, she may be sick. Call her doctor.
- **Abnormal Movement in a Body Part** — If your baby stops showing normal movement of a body part, like an arm or leg, call her doctor.

Keeping your baby safe

- **PROTECT YOUR BABY FROM PETS.** Sometimes pets get jealous of new babies and bite them.
- **TEST BATH WATER.** Be sure it's warm . . . but never hot! You can test it with your forearm or the inside of your wrist.
- **SUPPORT HIS HEAD AND NECK** whenever you hold your baby (which you should do a lot)!
- **NEVER LEAVE A BABY ALONE IN A CAR — NOT EVEN FOR A MINUTE!** Picture this: You're in a hurry. You just need to go into the store for a second, so you leave the baby in the car. He'll be OK, right? What happens if you can't find what you need? What happens if the checkout line is longer than you thought? Here's what can happen:
 - Even in mild weather, if the windows are up it can get hot enough to hurt your baby's brain—permanently!
 - Someone could steal your car—and your baby;

- If you leave the engine running, the older baby could climb out of the car seat and bump the car into gear by accident;
- The baby could hit power controls and get stuck in moving seats or windows;
- Engine fumes could make him sick or kill him. It might be easier to leave a baby in the car, but it's not very smart. **Take him with you!**

- **NEVER LET ANYONE SMOKE ANYTHING AROUND YOUR BABY** because smoke hurts babies MORE than it hurts adults. Babies with parents who smoke get more lung problems, allergies, and ear and nose infections. Babies exposed to secondhand smoke have an increased risk of dying from SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome).

Parent TIP

- If you are a smoker, where will you smoke? Can you quit now?
- What will you say to friends who light up in the house?
- Is there a place outside where you can tell them to go if they need to smoke?



Mommy blues

Many moms, after having their babies, can feel depressed for a while. They may cry easily. They may not eat or sleep. They may get angry or worry over what seems like minor stuff. Many doctors feel these changes are caused by **hormones** that are out of whack.

Mom's hormones were playing a tennis match while she was pregnant. It will take a while for them to get back to normal. The main thing to remember is **be patient!**

In most cases these feelings last only a few weeks. About all you can do is support your baby's mom. Encourage her to get out of the house for a while, and see that she's eating a healthy diet.



What does this mean?

What are Hormones? They are chemicals made by our bodies that can affect lots of stuff about us: how we look, how we act, how we grow, and how we feel.

Bonding

Bonding is important to your baby because it will give him a feeling of safety and help him feel good about himself. Bonding doesn't happen all at once. It takes time. But the earlier you start the closer your bond will get.



What does this mean?

Bonding - You mean like super glue? Even better. Bonding is the feeling of closeness that grows between you and your baby.

For the first four to six weeks after your baby is born, he probably won't give you many signs that you're doing a good job. In fact, he may seem to just sleep, eat, wet and cry all the time. But he's bonding with you whether you notice it or not! Pretty soon he will win your heart, and you will win his!

“HOW DO I GO ABOUT BONDING?”

One of the best ways to bond is to make some special time to spend with your baby in the hospital or as soon after birth as possible.

- **THE STARING CONTEST.** Stare at your baby. See who will blink first. Think you will win? Think again. Babies love to stare at people. You'll have a battle on your hands!

- **PLAY KANGAROO!** Strap on a baby carrier, pop the baby in, and go on about your business. Rake leaves, fold laundry, go for a short walk. Your kid will love every minute.
- **READ OUT LOUD!** Your baby loves to listen to you, but he won't have a clue what you're saying. So read stuff **YOU LIKE**. He won't mind. Read your favorite magazine, the want ads, the TV listings. To him it's a nursery rhyme.

One of the most important gifts you can give your baby is to teach him how to trust—to know that you are there with him when he needs you and that he can depend on you.

“WHY IS TRUST SO IMPORTANT?”

Because babies that don't learn to trust will grow up:

- Not feeling safe,
- Not trusting other people,
- Not respecting others,
- Not feeling good or confident about themselves,
- Not believing that others (like you) love them,
- Not thinking they are important, or
- Not knowing how to care about others (like you).

How you act with your baby and care for him can affect how his brain grows, how he feels about himself and the world around him, how he feels about you and others for the rest of his life, and his ability to trust.

“HOW CAN I TEACH MY BABY TO TRUST?”

Your baby will learn to trust when he knows you will be there to:

- Comfort him when he cries,
- Feed him when he's hungry,
- Play with him when he's bored,
- Change his diaper when it's wet or soiled, and
- Hold him when he's lonely.

Trying to figure out what your baby needs and being there to help lets your baby know he can depend on you and trust you. He needs these things to grow up healthy, happy and smart.

Helping your baby's body grow



Your child will start to get control over the way she moves her body as she grows.

- As a newborn she will grab anything you put in her hands. She does it naturally. She'll even try to grab with her feet!
- Your baby's head will wobble for a while, so you will need to keep supporting it when you hold her and pick her up.
- She might sleep as much as seven hours a night and stay awake for as long as 10 hours a day.

“WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP MAKE MY BABY STRONG AND HEALTHY?”

Give her lots of playtime. Do things that help her use the new things she’s learning, like moving her head and hands on purpose. Babies need exercise just like you do, so get her out of her infant carrier!

Parent TIP

Be careful! Bright lights can bother babies’ eyes, and loud noises can scare them enough to make them cry. Your kid is not ready to be a rock star just yet.

Hold her, carry her, and play with her for a few minutes at a time all through the day. This helps her muscles learn how to work together . . . and she’s learning that you love her. Near the end of the third month your baby might start rolling when you diaper her. See how far she can roll by herself. Then give her a little help to show her she can do more.

Helping that brain grow NEWBORN BABIES CAN THINK!

Okay, they don’t think in words yet, but those little brains are really soaking up the world around them! Your baby won’t take long before he starts to connect things together. At this early stage your baby is just starting to figure out what different things look like. He really likes round things better than things with straight lines, and black-and-white things better than colored things.

“ARE THERE WAYS I CAN HELP MAKE MY KID SMARTER?”

Right now your baby’s brain is hooking up things that will let him make sense out of the world around him. The way you look, sound, smell, feel and act around your baby affects how these hookups are made. The more you stimulate him, the more his brain develops.

Parent **TIP**

STIMULATE HIS BRAIN? How do I do that? Give it exercise. Don’t just let him lie there. Show your baby new things, make new sounds, talk to him, give him things to touch, take him places . . .stuff like that!

Here are a few things you can do to help your baby’s brain grow, things that will make him smarter and healthier:

- **Hold a toy up for him to see.** Then move it from left to right. See if just his eyes follow, or if he turns his head, too.
- **Play Peek-a-boo.** Doing this over and over will teach your baby how to expect things.
- **Sing to your baby and/or play music.** It can comfort him and help him practice listening. Babies love music.
- **Pick up your baby and show him pictures on the wall.** This helps him catch on to new shapes and colors.
- **Talk to your baby,** not only in normal speech or baby talk, but in lots of different ways.

Don’t prop him up in front of the TV. The TV does not respond to him. He cannot understand it or learn from it at this stage. He needs **real** attention.

Learning the language

NEWBORN BABIES CAN COMMUNICATE!

Babies have ways of telling you what they think, feel and want. Crying is one way to say many things. Watching what she does helps you to figure out what she wants. Here are some tips:

When she wants to say, “Cool it! I need a break” she might:

- Turn her head away;
- Look away;
- Sneeze or cough;
- Arch her back;
- Kick her legs or wave her arms;
- Push away; or
- Hiccough.

When she wants to say, “Let’s party!” she might:

- Smile at you;
- Look into your eyes;
- Widen her eyes;
- Open her hands and reach out;
- Babble and coo;
- Laugh;
- Get excited;
- Try to touch you; or
- Sometimes cry so you will pick her up.

When she wants to say, “I don’t know, but fix it” she might:

- Cry;
- Kick her legs;
- Wave her arms;
- Turn her head away, searching for something; or
- Get excited.

As she gets older, she’ll be able to show you more and more about how she thinks and feels by using her own special language. We call it “Babyspeak.” It’s important that you let her know you understand. The more you do, the more she shows you how much she wants and needs and loves you.

Parent TIP

What does your baby say in **BABYSPEAK**? What are some special ways you’ve noticed? See if you can guess what some of her new sounds mean.

“HOW CAN I HELP HER LEARN TO TALK?”

Now and then, when it’s just you and your baby, try talking to her without touching her. This will help her pay more attention to your voice and teach her some of the sounds you make.

Notice how your baby reacts to different sounds. See what she does when she hears your voice—or music—or sounds from one of her toys. With

your baby on her back in her bed, say her name until she turns her head in your direction. Move to the other side of the bed and say her name again. This game teaches her to know your voice and learn her own name. Try different things. Pretty soon you'll start figuring out what she likes (or doesn't like) by the sounds she makes.

Helping your baby learn about life

Your baby loves to learn. He wants to see, hear, touch and smell new things. The more he learns about the world around him, the easier it will be for him to deal with life and grow up happy and sure of himself. It's probably getting easier for you to tell how he feels, because he's starting to understand what feelings are and how to show them.

Your baby understands feelings like happy, scared, or uncomfortable. He gurgles, laughs, smiles, and makes cooing sounds when he's happy. That's BABYSPEAK for "Life is good."

“CAN I DO THINGS THAT WILL HELP HIM GET READY FOR LIFE?” He won't learn much if you leave him in an infant carrier all day. Pick him up and do things with him!

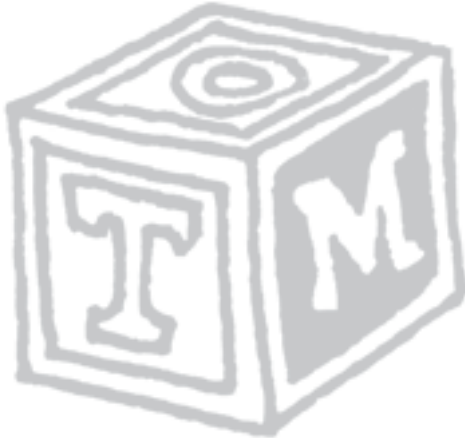
- Hug, kiss and cuddle him;
- Carry him around;
- Tickle and play with him;
- Read and sing to him.

When you do these things

- His love for you gets stronger;
- He trusts you more;
- He learns to communicate;
- He learns that he can be safe with you.

Parent **TIP**

Move around when you talk to him. He will try to follow the sound of your voice. Showing him how to look around is a good way to start showing him how much there is in the world to see.



Chapter 2

MONTHS FOUR THROUGH SIX

Helping your baby grow

Lately she might be trying to roll over from her tummy to her back and raise her body up using her arms. This shows you that those muscles are getting stronger.

She might be trying to help when you pull her to a sitting position. In a while she'll be able to sit up by herself. Don't push it. Let her take her time with these things.

She might start trying to turn herself over, from back to front to back. She'll soon try to crawl by rocking her hands and knees and picking up one leg at a time. All this practicing helps her get ready to crawl and keep her balance.

Parent TIP

If she's teething, give her something cold to chew and suck on. You can use rubber teething rings or a wet wash cloth that has been placed in the freezer for 30 minutes as a handy teething aid. Just be sure to wash it after each use.

“WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP MAKE MY BABY STRONG AND HEALTHY?”

Try making things she does and places she goes every day more regular. That will help her get used to eating and sleeping at the same times each day.

Sometimes a baby can get her nights and days mixed up. When this happens, keep her in a dark room at night and a bright room during the day. Don't be in a hurry. It can take a few weeks for her to get her clock back on track.

Ask your baby's doctor if it's okay to start feeding solid foods. Only feed her things the doctor says are safe. And don't overdo it! Babies should get most of what they need from breast milk or formula until they're about a year old. It's also possible that your baby could be allergic to some foods, so it's best to ask your doctor before you introduce food to her.



What does this mean?

What is allergic? That means she could get sick — or even die — from something that doesn't bother most people.

Helping your baby's brain grow

Your baby is starting to understand that he is not the same as everything else around him. He's not part of the lamp or rug or dog. He's different—and, for him, that's big news! He'll probably start spending a lot of time finding out about his hands, his feet, and his mouth:

- how they look,
- what they taste like,
- what they feel like, and
- what they do.

He loves it when he learns he can make things happen. If a toy squeaks when he whacks it, your baby might whack it again to see if he can make it squeak again.

When you tell him not to do something, don't expect him to remember for long at this age. He's not trying to make you mad. His brain just isn't ready for that yet. He's also finding out that he can't make other things do what he wants them to do. And that could bring on “cranky time.”

He is happiest when you're close by. Sometimes he'll cry to get you to come closer and pay attention. If you come when he cries it makes him feel like he can talk to you and tell you that he needs you. That's great! Pick him up and play with him.

“HOW CAN I HELP MY CHILD BE SMARTER?”

- Your baby notices when a voice sounds angry. It might make her frown and even cry when she hears angry voices. It scares her big-time! If you're feeling angry about something, leave the room and take a few minutes to cool off.
- Think about how boring it must be to lie on your back all day and stare at the ceiling! That's what your baby does if you don't give her things to look at. Always remember, the more she sees and hears and touches, the more she learns.
- Hang things over the baby's crib. Put them close enough for her to touch. Make sure they are not things that can hurt her. When she gets tired of them, hang up new things to keep it interesting.
- Take her around the house and show her pictures. Talk about the people and things that the pictures show.
- **Read to your child.** If you haven't started yet, don't put it off. Show her books with lots of pictures and make up stories about them.



Helping your baby learn language

HE'S GETTING BETTER AT BABYSPEAK!

Your baby is testing out all kinds of new sounds. When he makes one he likes, he'll do it over and over. He is beginning to understand some words, mostly by the tone of your voice.

He's also working on understanding the difference between loud and soft sounds. Babies don't scream and yell in restaurants and churches to make people mad. They do it because the rooms sound different. He'll start to understand his name soon! You'll probably notice him turning his head to look at you when you say it.

Parent TIP

Some of the sounds that your baby is making are sounds he's heard mom and dad make. Listen and see if you can tell what sounds he is doing. Where could he have heard them? If you're using words like #*%@!, what is he learning?

“HOW CAN I HELP MY BABY LEARN TO TALK?” Be sure to keep talking to your baby. Remember to always tell him good things about himself. Use words like “smart,” “healthy,” “happy” and “cute.” This may sound crazy but try having a conversation with your baby. Give him a chance to talk back. It won't make sense, but he will love it! He is learning:

- That he can make the same sound again and again,
- That you want to talk to him,
- That he is important.

The more you talk to your baby the smarter he will be. Watch how much he likes to listen to you.

Helping your baby learn about life

You might notice that your baby spends a lot of time looking at things around her — especially when she is in a new place. She is simply soaking up her world, learning what everything is and what it does.

Your little baby has feelings and she's starting to understand them! You might notice her showing fear, anger or disgust.

If your baby thinks you aren't paying enough attention to her, she might get scared and fussy. When you pick her up, she'll hold onto you.

Parent TIP

What are some of your baby's moods? How does she let you know when she has had enough and when she wants more?

“CAN I DO THINGS THAT WILL HELP MY BABY GET READY FOR LIFE?” Sure! Take your baby out with you when you can. Go places like the store, the mall — anywhere that will let her see more people and places.

Helping her feel safe and happy is one of your most important jobs right now. If she feels safe with you now, when she’s older she’ll feel better about the rest of the world. That will make it easier for her to tackle life on her own.

A whole night’s sleep



WE’VE GOT GOOD NEWS! Some time between four and six months old your baby will be ready to start sleeping all night! But don’t break out in tears of joy just yet.

WE’VE GOT BAD NEWS! Babies’ nights are shorter than yours. For most of them, five hours is a good, long night’s sleep. It will still be awhile before they go seven or eight hours at a stretch.

WE’VE GOT GOOD NEWS! Some babies learn how to sleep through the night all by themselves.

WE’VE GOT BAD NEWS! Most don’t. They need help.

“I NEED SOME REST! HOW CAN I GET HER TO SLEEP ALL NIGHT?”

There are some things you can do to help them along.

- Cut a little time off her afternoon nap. Not much at first. You don't want her waking up cranky!
- When you're feeding her supper, turn the TV, the radio and most of the lights off. This gives her the idea that it's time to calm down.
- When you put her to bed, spend a few minutes talking to her. Your voice helps her feel calm and safe.

To help your baby learn to get to sleep on his own, you can:

1. Let him cry for about five minutes. Then go in and make sure he's not sick and doesn't have a full diaper.
2. Stay with him about three minutes to calm him down again . . . but don't pick him up;
3. Leave before he falls asleep. This teaches him to go to sleep alone;
4. If he starts crying again, wait a little longer, maybe ten minutes. Then do the whole thing again;
5. Then wait 15 minutes and do it again;
6. Keep doing it every 15 minutes until he falls asleep.

It's a tough job, but if you stay with it, he should be sleeping through the night in four or five days. If you don't stay with it, it could be a very long time before he sleeps through the night. That goes for you, too!

Chapter 3

MONTHS SEVEN THROUGH NINE

Helping that body grow

By this time, your baby is probably getting better at sitting by herself. Soon she will be able to sit up from lying on her stomach.

Parent TIP

Now that she's pulling herself up, you'll have to lower the mattress in her crib to keep her from climbing out. If you have stairs, be careful. She'll probably try to crawl up them.

She is learning how to do lots of pointing, poking and grabbing things. She might drop one toy and grab another just for practice.

“WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP MAKE MY LITTLE ONE STRONG AND HEALTHY?” If your baby isn't strong enough to sit up alone yet, make sure he has good support for his back when he's playing. You might play with him by sitting back-to-back and putting a mirror to the side so you can see each other.

Check with your baby's doctor or clinic to find out about foods that make your baby sick. They can also tell you if he's allergic to anything.

Here are some things you can do to help your little crawler work on walking:

- Set aside regular times for him to practice what he can already do so he gets better at it;
- Watch for slippery floors, especially when he's just wearing socks. Falling can make him afraid of trying to walk;
- Make sure furniture around him won't tip over and doesn't have sharp corners.

Parent TIP

Don't worry if he stops being interested in walking for a while. It's normal. He's busy learning a lot of new things. He'll get back on track soon.



Helping that brain grow

It's sometimes hard to stay cool when your baby keeps doing the same thing over and over and over. He's not trying to bug you! This is part of how your baby learns. He's just trying to find out if the same thing happens each time. Some things he might do that might make you pull your hair out are:

- Keep dropping something from his high chair to see if you pick it up every time;
- Throw something again and again to see where it goes;
- Keep pushing a talk button on a toy to see if it says the same thing every time.

Parent TIP

This is a good time to give your baby a box or container that he can put blocks or toys in. It helps him practice making his hands and eyes work together. He'll fill it—and empty it—and fill it again!

These days your baby is getting busier and can do more things. That's great, but it might get harder to put him down for a nap. He's sleepy, but there are so many things to do. Expect him to get cranky when this happens.

Your baby is starting to figure out the meanings of sounds. He's putting things together in his head, things like:

- When he hears the sound of your voice or your cough, he knows you're close by,
- The sound of water running in the bathtub means it's bath time.

Your son's memory is getting better. He can remember a game, a toy or a person from the day before.

Parent TIP

Playing Peek-a-boo is still a favorite game for your baby. Try some different ways of playing the game. Duck behind some furniture and then pop up. Hop in front of him when he's in his high chair. Always make it new and surprising and fun . . . but never scary!

“ARE THERE WAYS I CAN HELP MAKE MY BABY SMARTER?”

Yes! Keep up with his brain. The same old stuff makes him bored, and bored brains don't learn. Make sure there are plenty of things to play and learn with, but just give him a few at a time. Too many toys can confuse him. Mix things up – be creative, make homemade toys or invent new games to keep him thinking and learning.

If your baby does something that could make him hurt himself or is playing with something that he shouldn't, try this:

- Gently, but firmly move him away from what he's doing.
- Gently, but firmly say, “No.”
- Then RIGHT AWAY find something else for him to look at or do.

He'll get interested in the new thing, but way down deep in his head he will remember the “No.” It will take many times hearing it, but he'll catch on to what it means pretty soon. But *don't overdo it*. Babies can't learn very easily if everything is a “No.”

Learning the language

The way your baby is growing the most right now is with sounds. He practices making more and more sounds so he can use them to tell you what he wants — and doesn't want.

***Parent* TIP**

What are his favorite sounds right now? What is the latest sound he's learned to make? One of the first words he learns is his name.

Your baby is working on sounding like you. He'll jabber . . . then be quiet . . . then jabber again — sometimes louder, sometimes softer. He's trying to make it sound like conversation.

Lots of times when you look into your baby's eyes and talk to him, he will reach out and touch your lips. He's not trying to say, "Shut up." He's figuring out how to talk by seeing how it FEELS!

“HOW CAN I HELP MY BABY LEARN TO TALK?” Make sounds when your baby is touching your lips—sounds like “Mmmm” or “Ba, ba, ba” or “Pa, pa, pa.” Think up some of your own. Sit quietly with your baby and show him picture books. For the next couple of months, he will really love books with thick, hard pages with animals or people in them.



Helping your baby learn about life

About this time your baby has found out how to crawl. He'll go exploring places that he could only look at before. The more he moves around, the more names of places and things he'll learn.

Your baby sees that you can do things by yourself. He wants to be like you, so he will probably try more and more things by himself. If you don't need help eating, why should he need it? He'll try to feed himself or hold his own bottle. He won't be very good at it, but he's trying!

One big discovery for your baby around this age is that animals are a lot more interesting to watch than toys — and people are more interesting than animals. He's probably starting to watch other babies play, but he might not want to join them just yet.

Parent TIP

Remember, your kid trusts you and still needs you there to let him know what you think about all these new things. You're not just your baby's parent —you're his teacher, too!

“CAN I DO THINGS THAT WILL HELP MY BABY GET READY FOR LIFE?” Your baby is figuring things out faster than ever. Play with him as much as you can, because he really wants to learn—and have fun with you!

If your baby is shy, that probably won't change for a while. It takes time to grow out of being shy. Tell him how good he is and how proud you are of him when he does things. And include him in all the things your family does. He loves that!

Baby-proofing

It's never too early to start “baby-proofing” the place. Babies think the world is cool. They want to explore it—and that's great! What they don't know is how dangerous some things are. But YOU DO, so protect your kid! Be a watchdog! Make sure your baby is never awake and alone in a room unless he's in his crib.

Parent TIP

“Baby-proof?” You mean make it so babies can't get in? He's already in. And before you know it he'll be walking! “Baby-proofing” means making his home safe for him so he can't hurt himself or break stuff. It's a big job. Start early.

“WHAT KINDS OF THINGS WILL HE WANT TO PLAY WITH?”

Think like a kid. Look at the world like he would. Get down on the floor and crawl around. What would he want to grab or stick his fingers into? Move it all away from him.

- Put locks on kitchen and bathroom cabinets that are down low. They're full of cool stuff that he will want to play with!
- Put away anything that's small enough to go in his mouth. He wants to put everything in there!
- Put covers on all electrical outlets or push big pieces of furniture in front of them.
- Your home is full of poisons! Don't think so? How about soaps, cleansers, detergents and medicines (prescription AND over-the-counter stuff)? Put them all in high cabinets.
- It might be time to move all your CDs and videos to higher shelves. In fact, put away anything you don't want broken.

When you make his home safe you are doing three things for your baby:

1. You're protecting him from danger;
2. You're giving him a chance to run free, to explore his world without people constantly saying, "No!"
3. You're helping him become smarter and more creative. OK, four things...
4. You're being a great parent!

Parent TIP

Nobody's perfect. You're going to miss something. So make a list of things you've learned to do as a parent and check it every month. Keep adding new stuff to it.

Chapter 4

MONTH TEN THROUGH TWELVE

Helping that body grow

IT'S ABOUT TIME FOR THE BIG MOMENT!

Maybe you've noticed that your baby is getting better at climbing up and down on the couch. That's because her large muscles are getting strong—so strong that she could be ready to . . . **WALK!**

In fact, she may already be doing it. Babies start walking at different times. One minute they're crawling, the next they're up and standing on their own two feet. Pretty soon she will be able to go from crawling to sitting and back again more quickly. That sounds easy to you, but it's a big deal for her! Some of the things that your baby will practice doing are:

- Reaching,
- Clapping her hands,
- Letting go of one toy to grab another,
- Holding,
- Standing up from a squat,
- Pointing with her index (first) finger, and
- Doing different things with each hand.

“WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP MAKE MY LITTLE ONE STRONG AND HEALTHY?”

Play with your baby and help her practice all the things she's learning to do. Put interesting toys in front of her. Make sure they're close enough to reach but far enough away so she can work her muscles.

Try rolling a ball to her and then asking her to roll it back. Whatever games you play, always remember to be careful. **Babies are fragile.**

When she works on walking, cheer her on but don't be in too big a hurry. She will learn best if she does it at her own speed and knows you're proud of what she can do.

If she gets the chance, she will climb up and down stairs and out of her playpen or crib. You have to really watch her closely these days. Her 12 month check-up is nearing. Go ahead and schedule the appointment a month before so your baby won't be late for her check-up.

Helping that brain grow

WHAT A MEMORY THAT KID HAS GOT!

Around this age your baby is getting better at remembering what he was doing before something else came along and distracted him. These days he can go back to what he was doing before the second thing came along. He's catching onto the idea that some things are bigger than others and that he can put things inside other things.

He's also starting to figure out that he can make things happen! That makes him feel great about himself . . . BUT it might drive you nuts!

Nobody likes diapers, and you probably want to get him to start using the potty as soon as possible. Toilet training will be really hard for him to learn until he's 2 to 3 years old because:

- He needs to be going at the same times every day and
- He needs to know enough words to tell you when he has to go.

“ARE THERE WAYS I CAN HELP MAKE MY CHILD SMARTER?”

Give your baby puzzles to figure out. Make them up—but make them easy. You might give him a shoebox, a coffee can and a toy that will only fit in one of them. Then ask, “Will this toy fit in this box or this can?”

Try using a pot and some lids of different sizes. Show him how the right one fits. Then have him try different lids until he gets the right one. Make sure he gets plenty of pot banging and lid rattling time to keep it fun. Figuring out these puzzles will help make connections in his brain that teach him how to make his hands and eyes work together.

Read to him—EVERY DAY.



Children learn to love books by being around them a lot . . . and by seeing how much you love to read to them. Reading books to him now will help him become a better reader later.

Start with:

- Books with big, colorful pictures,
- Books with short, simple words,
- Books that have different textures he can touch,
- Books that make sounds.

Learning the language

Your child is learning to say new words—and he’s loving it! When he discovers a new one you’ll hear it a million times. Remember, practice makes him better at it!

Your baby is also getting old enough to know what the phrases you teach him mean. When you say something your baby doesn’t want to hear, he’ll pretend he didn’t hear you. Want proof? Say, “Nap time” when he’s not sleepy, and he won’t even look at you. Whisper “cookie” and he’ll be climbing up your leg in a second!

“HOW CAN I HELP MY BABY LEARN TO TALK?”

Start by asking your baby questions:

- “Where’s your storybook?”
- “Do you like the red shirt or the blue one?”

If he just gives looks or noises for his answer try to get him to use words — but don’t push too hard. It will make him not want to talk.

While you're changing your baby's clothes, tell him what you're doing. "First we put your arm in. Next we put your other arm in. Then we put your leg in . . ." Not only are you talking and teaching him, you're having a conversation at the same time. Imagine that—your baby and you having a conversation!

Helping your baby learn about life

Your little girl is getting good at picking up on how you feel. Right now she might only notice if you are happy, sad or mad, but she's learning more all the time.

She likes to make you happy, but she also does things on purpose that make you unhappy to see how you'll react.

You're probably getting better at noticing how she feels, too. Being able to pick up on each other's mood shows that the bond you have with your baby is getting stronger.

Exploring makes her smarter and stronger. Don't leave her in her playpen these days. Let her loose to discover the world! Just be sure to stick with her so her exploring is safe. Always be where she can see or hear you.

But if you need to leave her with a grandparent or a sitter, act like it's no big deal when you say goodbye to her. She trusts you to protect her! And she's learning that you will come back.

“CAN I DO THINGS THAT WILL HELP MY LITTLE GIRL GET READY FOR LIFE?”

Help her learn to be curious and get her ready for the time when she can feed herself. Put five or six different foods (that are good for your baby) on the table in front of her. Let her pick the ones she wants to eat. Once in a while give her a cup of formula instead of the bottle, or put her down for a nap without one. You can buy special cups with spouts that won't let the formula spill.

Parent **TIP**

Your daughter is doing lots of things on her own lately. You might think she doesn't need all that huggy, kissy, hold-me stuff anymore. Not true! She needs it as much as ever. Show her you love her whenever you can.

Make a baby-proof place in your home that is OK for your baby to explore.

Put interesting things in this place, like:

- Stuffed animals,
- Balls,
- Books,
- Unbreakable baby mirror, or
- Simple toys that have big parts she can put together.

Don't forget about setting up routines. Your baby is happiest when she eats, sleeps and plays at the same times and in the same places every day. She loves knowing what to expect. Later she'll be able to handle it better when things change.

What scares your baby?

Your baby is one of a kind — but you don't need us to tell you that.

Because he's different from all other babies, he sees the world in his own special way. There are things in the world that scare him — maybe even more than they scare other kids. That's OK! With a little time and a lot of love, he'll get over the things that he's afraid of. Things like:

- **Falling** – When this happens, a smile, a hug and a pat will help him feel better.
- **The Dark** – Put a night light near his crib.
- **Being apart from you** – When you leave the room, tell him you'll be right back. He'll catch on soon.
- **Animals** – Keep dogs and cats away until he's older. At this age house pets look HUGE to him!
- **Things you wouldn't believe** – Like the vacuum cleaner or a hair dryer! Hold him, hug him and show him how they work.
- **Changes** – Remember, babies like routine. When things change, give him time to get used to them and give him lots of hugs.



Just remember to go easy on him when he's afraid. Don't yell at him or make fun of him. He needs you to understand and love him the most when he's scared.

How much food?

Are you feeding your baby too much . . . or too little? There's only one person who can answer that: **your baby!** When she eats too quickly, her tummy doesn't have time to tell her she is full. If she eats more than she needs, she'll get fat. Vegetables and fruits are great things to feed your daughter, but by themselves they won't give her all the things she needs to grow strong and healthy. She needs lots of different kinds of foods. Every day give your baby several small servings from each of these food groups:

- **Vegetables and fruits** 4 servings
- **Meat, fish, poultry, eggs** 2 servings
- **Milk, cheese, yogurt, cottage cheese** 3 servings
- **Bread, crackers, cereal, rice, spaghetti** 4 servings

Your baby doesn't have to eat something from every food group at every meal. Sometimes she may not want to eat at all. That's OK. One healthy meal a day plus foods from each of the four food groups above should do just fine at this age.

Parent TIP

Having a picky eater can be frustrating. Try to keep this in mind: You should decide WHAT your child eats, but she's the only one who knows HOW MUCH to eat.

Handling the “no-no’s”

“No.” It’s a little bitty word. Maybe that’s why we say it twice to kids. These days your baby keeps wanting to do more and more on his own—and that’s great—but not when he’s doing things he shouldn’t. It’s getting to be time for discipline.



What does this mean?

Discipline? Discipline means finding good, respectful ways of teaching your kid how to behave the right way.

- **Set limits:** Kids don’t like to hear “no,” but deep down they feel safer when they know who is in charge and what is OK—and NOT OK—to do.
- **Plan ahead:** You know your baby pretty well. Try to keep him away from problems before they happen.
- **Give him something else to do:** If he’s doing something he shouldn’t, give him a new thing to do to get his mind off the bad stuff. His favorite toy is great for that!
- **When you say “no” stick to it:** Once your kid gets in his head that he can talk you out of “no” he won’t believe that you mean it. And every time you say “no” you’ll get an argument.
- **Do it with love:** Always let him know that, even though he did something wrong, you still love him and always will.

First birthday bash!

Wow, how did this happen? Your kid is almost a whole year old!

Here are some ways to handle a first birthday party:

- **Have a kids' party:** Invite a few kids (six or eight maximum) **and their parents**. You'll need their help. Don't let it go longer than an hour. Do you want a roomful of tired, cranky kids? Open presents. You're not going to believe it, but the kids will get a bigger kick out of the boxes and paper and ribbons than the gifts. Instead of a big fancy cake, serve cupcakes or JELL-O, or whatever. Stick a candle in your baby's dish, sing "Happy Birthday," and help him blow out the candle. They'll all love it! Instead of planning all kinds of party games — which they won't understand — let them play with the new toys.
- **Have a party WITHOUT KIDS:** Invite some of your friends and celebrate the big day with them and your baby's other parent.
- **Don't have a party at all:** Blow the whole thing off. Get a babysitter. Go out and celebrate . . . just Mom and Dad. Keep in mind that your baby is way too young to understand what it means to have a birthday. So keep it simple.



Chapter 5

WELCOME TO FATHERHOOD!

Why dads are important

The critical role that mothers play in their child's life is clear. But sometimes the equally important role that fathers play is overlooked or undervalued. It takes both of you to help your baby grow up healthy — not just his body, but the way your baby thinks and feels, too. Always remember, you are one of the two most important people to your baby. He needs and counts on you.

He loves to explore Dad's face—first with his eyes, then with his fingers. He loves to watch and listen when you talk and laugh. He even finds out how you smell. While he's doing this, your baby is filing it all away in his mind in a special “This is my daddy” place. The way he feels about you will help him get along well with both males and females as he grows up.

Your baby started learning the differences between Mom and Dad **BEFORE HE WAS BORN!** When he was inside Mom he got to know how you sounded. Now he's putting faces with the voices!

Moms and Dads can be different in the way they interact with their child. Sometimes dads do things with and for their baby that moms may not do, just like moms may do things that the dad may not. What's important

to know is that children benefit when both parents can be there for their child(ren), each doing things in their own special way.

Dads make a difference

You helped bring a baby into the world, so you already made a difference, and you will keep on making a difference whether you stay in his life or not. Being there for your baby will give him a better chance to grow up healthy, strong and smart. Not being there will make a difference, because he will grow up missing out on what dads can do. He will grow up hungry for his dad.

WHAT KIND OF DIFFERENCE DO YOU WANT TO MAKE?

If you care about your baby and stay close to him, YOU can be the DIFFERENCE that really makes a DIFFERENCE in your baby's life. Let's face it. It's easy to make a baby. Being a dad is different. To be a dad you've got to know your stuff. You have to be involved. Some people think you have to be a woman to understand and care about having babies. NOT TRUE! As a man, there's a lot you can do . . . starting NOW!

There are people who can help make sure Mom and the baby are both doing OK. The thing is, they don't always let Dad know how things are going. So get in there and ask questions. Get information for yourself. Be involved!

¡GRACIAS PAPA!

THANKS DAD!

Just the facts, Jack

When dads spend time with their kids from the very beginning and work to keep close feelings between them, good things happen to the kids.

- They are more likely to be active, healthy and strong babies, toddlers, preschoolers and school-aged children.
- Most do better than normal on developmental tests.
- They do better figuring out boy and girl roles.
- They are much less likely to be violent, anti-social, dangerous or even criminal.
- They wait longer before they start having sex.
- They are more likely to go to school and stay in school.
They are less likely to repeat a grade.
- Girls do better in math.
- Both boys and girls are better at being independent, having self-control and being leaders. They are more successful in life.
- Girls have healthier relationships later in their lives, especially with males. Remember that Dad is the first man they get to know.
- Boys who grow up without a father around are three times more likely to be put in a state juvenile institution.

How Do You Feel About Being a Dad?

When some men first find out that they are going to be dads they go into shock. Others just pretend it's not happening. For some dads it doesn't sink in until their partner is seven months pregnant, and for others it's the moment when they see or hold their newborn baby. You might feel happy, afraid, confused, concerned . . . or all these things at once.

Think about your own father or the dads you know. What kind of difference do those dads make in the life of their children? Do you want the same for your baby, or do you want things to be different?

Supporting your baby's mom

Being a dad is the most important job you'll ever have. Part of that job is being a good partner to Mom. Showing support is another important job that Dad has. When Mom comes home from the hospital she will feel exhausted! While childbirth is different for every woman, Mom's body has been through a lot. She will feel emotionally and physically drained, and will need your help to get back to normal.

“HOW DO I SUPPORT HER?”

Mom will feel better, faster if you:

- Give her time to rest,
- Show her you care how she feels,
- Let her spend time with her friends, and
- Enjoy playing with the baby, together with her.

Another way to show Mom support is by helping her care for your baby. You can do this by feeding the baby, diapering, bathing and grooming your baby, taking turns getting up with the baby during the night if you're living together, and taking care of your baby while Mom goes out shopping or on errands.

Pay Mom some attention that is just for her. Do things like:

- Find a sitter and take Mom out to dinner and a movie.
- Make her favorite meal.
- Go to the video store, let her pick any movie she wants and watch it with her. Don't laugh at or make cracks about it. Just sit next to her and enjoy watching it together.
- Give her a massage and listen to how her day went. Don't add things about your day . . . just listen. Every day try to find small and different ways to be nice to her. You'll be surprised how quickly little things add up;
- Think of new ways you can show support – things like :
 - cooking,
 - cleaning,
 - or running errands.

Parenting two-gether

Even though working with somebody else takes some extra effort and planning, it really pays off when you're raising a kid! Research on children and families show that children who were raised by two parents who care about each other and love their child tend to have better outcomes.

Even if the parents don't live together, working as a team gives their child a better chance at being successful. Work on these things:

- **Agreeing:** As parents you need to make sure you agree on:
 - Basic values you want your child to learn,
 - How your child should behave, what's OK and what's not,
 - Ways to discipline.
- **Sticking with it:** Once you agree on how to raise your child, stick with it: even when you're tired, even when you're feeling "guilty" or "mean," even when your little angel tries to wrap you around her finger!
 - Doing this will help her feel safe and secure and help her learn to respect you;
- **Supporting each other:** Children — even newborns — get confused and scared when you argue. If you and Mom don't agree, it is very important that you talk about it in private. If Mom is doing something you think is physically or emotionally dangerous, you have to make sure she stops, but that's the only time you should disagree in front of your child. Working together as parents is one of the most loving gifts you can give that special little person. It's a sign of wonderful parents!

WHAT IF YOU AND MOM ARE NOT TOGETHER?

**“HOW DO I GET INVOLVED IN MY BABY’S LIFE
IF MOM AND I DON’T GET ALONG?”**

Are you not getting along with Mom? Does she not want you around? Why is that? Figure it out! No kidding—this is important. One thing is for sure. You've got to want to do it! Being a dad takes work. But it's **good work** . . . the best you'll ever take on. Sure, the easy thing is just to back away. Let her have the kid, the work and the worries.

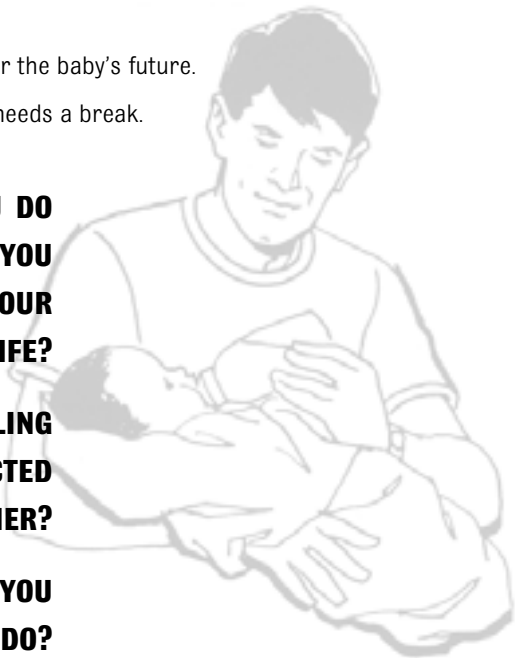
But then you wouldn't get any of the fun and laughs and love that amazing little person can bring. Mom will get it all. You won't get the chance to feel the pride watching her grow into somebody strong and healthy and good. Most of all, your kid loses out by not having YOU. Here are a few things you can do to show Mom you want to be in your kid's life:

- Live clean. Show the world you've got what it takes to be a real dad.
- Patch things up with her . . . at least enough so it's okay for you to be around.
- Talk with her about plans for the baby's future.
- Offer to help out when she needs a break.

**WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO
TO SHOW MOM YOU
WANT TO BE IN YOUR
BABY'S LIFE?**

**WHAT ARE YOU WILLING
TO DO TO BE CONNECTED
WITH HER?**

**WHAT ARE YOU
NOT WILLING TO DO?**



Make dadhood legal

GUESS WHAT?

If you're not married when the baby is born . . . you're **not automatically** the legal father. You don't have any rights when it comes to your kid! **"You've got to be kidding!"** Afraid not. The law sees fathers in a different way than mothers. That means you have to **ESTABLISH PATERNITY!**



What does this mean?

What does **"Establish Paternity"** mean? Simple. It means, "Doing the right thing." You can be the biological father (the guy who got Mom pregnant), but that doesn't make you the legal father. To make it legal, the law says you have to put your name on some papers and take responsibility for your kid.

HOW DO WE MAKE IT LEGAL?

In Texas you can sign a form right at the hospital. It's called the AOP (Acknowledgement of Paternity). Mom has to sign it, too. You don't have to do it right away at the hospital — you'll have other chances. Before you sign it, check with somebody you trust, somebody who knows this stuff — really knows —and find out all you can about how it works.

"WHY DOES IT MATTER IF I ESTABLISH PATERNITY?"

Because a lot of important things happen when a Dad and his kid are "official."

Here's what it does for your baby:

She knows who she belongs to. It makes her feel better about herself. She may be eligible to get inheritance, medical benefits, social security and possibly veteran's benefits. She can inherit things from you, like a car or a house. She'll be able to get the medical history from your side of the family.

Here's what it does for you:

If you and Mom break up, you can ask the court for visitation rights. That's right. If you're not legal, it's not automatic! It also establishes and protects your legal connection to your child. It protects your right to get medical and school records. Establishing paternity makes you feel like a responsible guy who's got the guts to face his responsibilities and be a real dad!

Living like a dad

BE THERE

We know. You've heard this before . . . and we'll keep saying it. **BE THERE.** (See, told ya!) When we say "be there," we don't mean "stand next to him." We mean you need to show him you're always dependable, always ready to help, always caring. If you want your kid to grow up into somebody you can be proud of, he needs you to show him how. He needs to know there's a guy who cares about him and thinks he's important. That way he can learn to be proud of himself.

STAY HEALTHY

You won't be much help to your baby if you're sick, drunk or stoned.

Help yourself and your kid by:

- Eating right,
- Getting enough sleep and exercise,
- Staying away from alcohol and drugs.

Your child needs you to be there. Don't let him down.

LEAVE TIME FOR YOU

Believe it or not, to be a good dad you will need to have time for yourself—doing things you enjoy that you can't do with your baby or partner, things like:

- Watching TV,
- Going out with your buddies,
- Going fishing, or
- Working out.

It's healthy for you to get out sometimes. You get a chance to relax and think about other things. And you're fresh and ready to do the "baby thing" when you come back. Don't be gone too long, but take some time regularly just for you. Keep this in mind, though: Partying can make people tired.

Don't make your baby suffer just because you're too tired to be with him.

What's most important here? There's time for friends and time for being a dad, but dadhood comes first!

BE A HERO

When a dad loves his kid, something special happens inside. You get brave. You become a hero. Burning buildings, falling trees . . . nothing will stop you from protecting that special little person of yours. It's natural. You don't even think about it. Sometimes being a hero does take work. But it's **good work**. To him you're a hero just by:



- Being honest,
- Controlling your temper,
- Being dependable,
- Teaching him new things,
- Being sober and straight, and
- Loving him.

Some of these are pretty hard jobs. Do your best. You'll show him what it means to be a hero . . . and you'll be the coolest, most important guy in his life. A Dad who shows his child the way to a better future is a **real** American hero!

Thinking like a dad

"I'm used to the way my life works. Having a baby will change everything."

NEWS FLASH #1:

Everything changed the minute Mom got pregnant.

NEWS FLASH #2:

Things can be better than ever. Helping your kid grow and learn about the world can be the single greatest thing that ever happens in your life . . . but it's up to you. It takes a Dad.

HERE'S A SPECIAL BONUS JUST FOR YOU!

If you try every day to be a better dad, you'll become a better person, too! Dads who stay with their families and really try their best turn into people who are happier, healthier, kinder, more understanding and more successful at their jobs.

HERE'S ANOTHER BONUS!

Remember how much fun you had when you were a kid? Remember how that faded away when you grew up? Guess what? You can do all the great kid stuff again and no one will think you're weird! Dads can get away with it!

"There's so much to know about a baby, so much to do. I'm afraid I'm going to mess up."

NEWS FLASH #3: You WILL mess up.

NEWS FLASH #4: So will EVERYBODY else. There is no such thing as a perfect dad, or a perfect mom, or a perfect anything. Forget about trying to be perfect. Just work on being the best you can.

Chapter 6

BABY STEPS — HELPFUL TIPS, IDEAS AND ACTIVITIES FOR MOM, DAD AND BABY

Working with family

RELATIVES

Many times family members (usually those who have had kids) want to move in and start taking care of the baby. They may think Dad is unnecessary. Give 'em a break. Many people don't know how important dads are to newborn babies — and how babies need and want dads as much as moms.

Stick with it. Don't let them get to you. Family members who want to help want just that — to help. Great! Let them help — but not take over! Try getting support from other moms and dads you know. They know exactly what you're going through and might have some creative ways to help. See if there are any parents' meetings near you. They get together to help each other be the best parents they can. You can find them through faith- and community-based organizations or through local government agencies.

FRIENDS

Everyone's got to have them, but they can be a BIG PROBLEM! It's hard when they're pulling you in one direction, and your partner and baby are pulling you in another. It's almost impossible for friends who don't have a baby to understand why you can't keep doing everything just like you did before you had a baby. After all, nothing has changed for them!

You need to think about how you'll react when your friends start putting on the pressure to party. Finding time for yourself is healthy, but too much time away from your baby hurts her, you and your partner.

What about big brother or big sister?

So there's another baby in the house. Big change for everybody! Remember, your first kid is still a kid. The idea of someone new getting between her and you can make her jealous or mad—or even scare her!

The way she figures it, if being a baby gets all the love and attention, then she'll be a baby, too! Watch for things like these:

- All of a sudden she's not doing so well with toilet training;
- She might start crawling again instead of walking;
- She might want to go back to using a baby bottle.



“WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP MY CHILD FEEL BETTER ABOUT THE NEW BABY?”

Here are some other things that can help:

- Pretend you don't notice her acting more baby-like. Just give her time, and pretty soon she'll be a big girl again;
- Having bad feelings can scare your kid. Talk to her about the way she feels. That lets her know you understand. Use words like “happy,” “sad,” and “angry” that help her give names to the feelings.
- Keep up the routines. When she sees that mealtime, playtime, bedtime and all the other stuff haven't changed, she'll feel better and safer.
- She'll see that you love her just like you did before the new baby came.
- Never leave the two kids alone together. If the older one is unhappy she might give the baby a pinch or a push.
- Explain how easy it is to hurt a baby. Tell her what a big girl she is when she PROTECTS her little brother or sister.
- Ask visitors to pay some extra attention to the older kid. It will help her feel important. And, hey, the baby won't even notice!
- If the baby isn't home from the hospital yet, have her help you pick out the clothes the baby will wear home.
- Every day make special time just for you and your oldest. Once a week try to go someplace together . . . just the two of you.

Help your child be a terrific big sister or big brother. Try to understand how the child feels and let her know you love her as much as ever.

All about cribs

When your baby comes home one of the most important things to have ready is a place for her to sleep. Why? Because when the baby is in bed, you're doing other things (if you're lucky you'll be sleeping, too). When you're not watching, things can happen.

MAKE YOUR BABY'S CRIB A SAFE PLACE TO SLEEP:

- Be sure that the bars on the crib are not more than $2 \frac{3}{8}$ inches apart. If the space is bigger, the baby's tiny head could get caught between them.
- Make sure all joints and parts fit tightly.
- If the side of the crib can be lowered, make sure it's still at least nine inches above the mattress when it stops. Any lower and the baby could fall out. Make sure you can lock the side up or down—but your baby can't unlock it.
- Make sure the mattress fits the crib. If you can fit two fingers between the mattress and the side, it's too small, and your baby can get stuck.
- Never paint a crib or any baby furniture with paint that has lead in it. That stuff is dangerous! Sand and repaint furniture that has peeling paint. The baby could eat it!
- If the crib is made of wood, sand off any places that could make splinters.
- Don't pick a crib with corner posts. Babies can get their clothes hung up on them and choke.

Car seat safety

Did you know that four out of five car seats are hooked up

THE WRONG WAY!?

“WHAT’S THE RIGHT WAY TO HOOK UP A CAR SEAT?”

Here’s how you should do it:

- Always read child restraint and vehicle manufacturers’ instructions for proper use and installation information.
- For kids that are under 20 pounds and are under one year old (like yours), you need to put the baby’s car seat in the **BACK SEAT** — not the front — and hook it up **FACING BACKWARDS**.
- **DON’T FACE HER TOWARD THE FRONT!** Babies can be hurt **BADLY** by air bags. And if you hit something, the sudden snap can do a lot of damage to her body;
- Once they are more than one year old and more than 20 pounds you can let them face the front . . . but that comes later.
- The car seat needs to be hooked to the back seat using the car’s safety belt. There are some newer cars that use a latch system. Remember to follow the directions that come with the baby’s car seat to make sure you do this right.
- **SNUG IT UP!** The car seat shouldn’t move more than one inch in any direction;
- The car seat comes with straps. **USE THEM.**
- Make sure the top of the straps go through the lowest slots that are at or below the baby’s shoulder level.
- Keep the straps **SNUG** and hold them together with the clip that comes with the seat. Put it at about the same level as her armpits;

- Never put your baby in a car seat you got from somebody else or in one that has been in a wreck. The seat could be worn out or weak;
- Make sure it's new. Baby car seats keep getting better, and the new ones are the safest.

Baby wipes

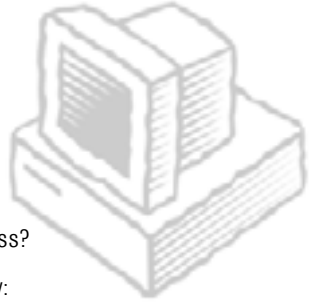
SAVE THE BIG BUCKS!

If you use baby wipes, you'll be going through 'em like paper cups at a picnic. The cost can really add up. Want a way to save on those baby wipes? It's easy.

MAKE YOUR OWN HOMEMADE BABY WIPES

1. Get a roll of paper towels. Cut the roll down the middle with a sharp knife (a serrated one works best to make two shorter rolls).
2. Find a plastic container that has a tight-fitting lid. It should be big enough to hold half a roll of paper towels. A disposable food container works great.
3. Pull out the cardboard tube from the middle of the roll and stick the two rolls into the container, ends down.
4. Mix these things together:
 - 1 Tablespoon of baby oil,
 - 1 Tablespoon of liquid bath soap for babies,
 - 2 cups of boiling water.
5. Now pour the stuff you just mixed up all over the paper towels and snap on the lid. The towels will soak up the soap and oil and turn into your own homemade baby wipes!

Help on the Web



Looking for more ideas about this parenting business?

Good for you! Here are a few websites you might try:

CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND PARENTING

- **Center for Child Well-being:**
www.childwellbeing.org
- **U.S. Department of Education - Parenting site:**
www.ed.gov/parents/landing.jhtml?src=pn
 - **Healthy Start, Grow Smart Series:**
www.ed.gov/parents/earlychild/ready/healthystart/index.html
- **Office of Family Initiatives:**
http://www.oag.state.tx.us/newspubs/publications_cs.shtml#ofi
Individual copies of publications are available upon request from the Office of the Attorney General – Texas.

HEALTH

- **Children’s Health Insurance Plan:**
www.hhsc.state.tx.us/chip/index.html
- **Centers for Disease Control Infants and children section:**
www.cdc.gov/doc.do/id/0900F3EC802270E4

CHILD SAFETY

- **Car Seat Safety information**
from the Texas Department of Public Safety:
www.txdps.state.tx.us/director_staff/public_information/carseat.htm

- **Child Care Licensing Information** from the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services: www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Care/

RELATIONSHIP SAFETY

- **Domestic Violence**
Texas Health and Human Services, Family Violence
[www.hhsc.state.tx.us/programs/family violence/](http://www.hhsc.state.tx.us/programs/family%20violence/)

The National Domestic Violence Hotline
www.ndvh.org

MARRIAGE EDUCATION AND INFORMATION

- **National Healthy Marriage Resource Center**
www.healthymarriageinfo.org/
- **Marriage Questions and Answers**
from the Texas Department of State Health Services
www.dshs.state.tx.us/vs/marriagedivorce/mdfaq.shtm

“House o’ Sound”

WHAT DOES THIS DO?

- When your baby was in the womb, she could hear, but everything was muffled. Now you can show her what makes the sounds.
- Doing this helps your baby’s brain and hearing improve.

STUFF YOU’LL NEED

- You
- Your baby
- Your house

HOW TO DO THIS:

1. Pick up your baby
2. Take her around your house
3. Show her sounds that things make, like the doorbell, the stereo, a clock—anything that makes sounds.

Parent TIP

Be sure the sounds aren't too loud. They might scare the baby. Watch your baby when you play this game. Does she do things to show she likes it? Can you tell when she's had enough?

“Shake, Rattle and Roll”

WHAT DOES THIS DO?

- Making rattle sounds is a good way to help your baby’s brain develop.
- Following things with her eyes helps her improve her “eye tracking.”

STUFF YOU’LL NEED:

- You
- Your baby
- A baby rattle, or something that makes noise

HOW TO DO THIS:

1. Hold the rattle about 12 inches from the baby’s face.
2. Shake the rattle gently until the baby looks at it.
3. Move the rattle slowly in different directions.
Stop and let her twist around to see it.

Parent TIP

Always praise your baby and talk to her between sounds. She will learn to look to you for answers. If your baby wants to hold the rattle, give it to her. She won’t hold it very long. Now you can play a new game. It’s called “Go Fetch.”

“Skyscraper”

WHAT DOES THIS DO?

This game will help your baby learn to control her fingers and muscles. It will also teach her that she can get better at things by doing them over and over.

STUFF YOU’LL NEED:

- Baby blocks

FOLLOW THESE EASY STEPS:

1. Put your baby on the floor with lots of plastic or wooden toy blocks.
2. Stack one block on top of the other to start your “skyscraper.”
3. Let her try stacking the next one, but be there to help.
4. When the stack gets too high let it tip over.
5. Start again. Keep doing it until she’s tired of the game.

Parent TIP

When the “skyscraper” falls down, laugh and clap. Let her know it’s fun, not sad or scary.

Chapter 7

COUPLE TALK

Couple Talk is adapted from **CoupleTALK: Enhancing Your Relationship, An Informal Personal Study Course**, Kansas State University, Agricultural Experiment Cooperative Extension Services

A message for single parents

Sometimes one parent isn't able or willing to play a part in their child's life. When this happens the child relies on the remaining parent for the love, safety and support that the child needs. Every day, across the state and country, single parents rise to the challenge of raising their child(ren).

We at the Office of the Attorney General salute those single moms and dads who overcome hardships to raise their children with little or no help from the other parent. Our Child Support Division works diligently to ensure that parents and families receive the court-ordered financial and medical support due to them. In state fiscal year 2006, the Child Support Division collected \$2 billion in child support.

Parenting is a rewarding but challenging life journey. Whether you're traveling as one or as two, seek out resources that can help with parenting needs. In Chapter Six, several online resources were listed. If you need access to the Internet, you may want to check with your local library, and ask if they have Internet access for public use.

Have you thought about . . . the “m” word?

Now that your baby is here you might be feeling extra-excited, anxious, or curious about how everything is going to work out. You might be thinking a lot about your relationship with the other parent and whether you want to make that relationship permanent. So have you, Mom and Dad, been talking to each other or thinking about the “m” word? Hmm, “m” . . . motorcycles, mansions, maps? Nope, we mean “m” as in marriage.

If you have been thinking about it, here are some facts that might help that thinking along. Did you know that researchers found that when kids are raised by their own parents in a healthy, married family, great stuff tends to happen? Here’s what they found.

THE KIDS

- Are healthier, both physically and mentally
- Are less likely to be poor
- Are more successful in school
- Have lower dropout rates
- Have fewer teen pregnancies
- Get better jobs when they get out of school
- Abuse drugs less
- Have fewer run-ins with the law

THE PARENTS

- Live longer (to enjoy the money their kids make in those good jobs!)
- Live healthier lives
- Make more money than unmarried parents
- Married men make up to 40% more than single men
- Married couples have more money by the time they're ready to retire than single people

So, what's getting in the way of getting married? What keeps you from taking that next step? Is it thoughts like:

- "I'm not sure I'm ready for that commitment."
- "We don't always see things the same way."
- "Shouldn't I wait till we're always getting along?"
- "If I could just get a good job we'd have the money for a nice wedding with a ring and all that."
- "There's a lot of stuff I need to handle first . . . a job, a car, a good place to live . . ."

Some people want everything to be just right, all worked out . . . everything handled and all together before they get married. But the truth is . . . MARRIAGE ISN'T THE FINISH LINE! Life doesn't happen that way! NOBODY in the history of the world has ever gotten everything worked out! Put marriage last and it won't ever happen. Marriage is about working together to get all those things that you both want.

But it's not just a marriage that makes these things work out – it's a healthy marriage! Every couple has problems and arguments. But people who want the best for themselves, their partners, and their kids learn how to cut each other some slack . . . and work things out! No question, marriage is pretty cool.

Studies have shown that people in healthy marriages have more happiness and less stress. But relationships do not just happen – you have to work at it. There are some basic ways to make relationships healthy, even though each relationship is different. This section is a starting point to show you ways to help your relationship become stronger. Before you get started, here are some helpful tips.

FIVE TIPS FOR HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

- 1. Talk with Each Other** – Make time to be each other's friend . . . to listen to each other and talk about whatever's on your mind.
- 2. Pay Attention to You, Too** – Don't forget about yourself, about the things that you need. How can you make those around you feel good if you don't feel good?
- 3. Be Dependable** – Do as you say and say as you do. If you take on a responsibility, complete it.
- 4. Fight Fair** – Everyone argues, but it doesn't have to be ugly. If you don't see eye to eye, that doesn't mean you have to stop loving each other.
- 5. Keep Your Life Balanced** – Life isn't about being hung up on one thing. The people in our lives can make us feel good, but they can't be our "everything" all the time. Find things that make you happy.

AS YOU READ THROUGH THIS SECTION, WHENEVER YOU SEE THIS PICTURE . . .

You'll get tips on working together whenever you see this picture.



You'll see this whenever we want to share a note with you.



You'll see an example of what we're talking about.



In a healthy marriage or relationship where both spouses respect, love, and are committed to each other, and motivated to work things out, conflicts can be resolved and positive changes are possible. This section can show you a few ideas on how to make your relationship better. But if you find your relationship is in serious trouble, or if there is abuse in your relationship, ask for help from family violence, community or faith-based organizations. It is never too late to make constructive changes in a partnership — as long as love, commitment, respect, and the motivation to work things out are present.

LESSON ONE: MARRIAGE AND FAMILIES

In the last 20-30 years, fewer people in the United States have been getting married and the age for getting married has been inching upward. For women, the average age for getting married went from 21 in 1970 to 25 in 2000. For men, it went from age 23 to 27.

However, most people do get married at some point in their lives. And many who don't get married would like to. For example, a recent study with couples who just had a baby but weren't married found that the majority of both the men and the women wanted to stay together and get married at some point in the future.

Here are some of the key benefits of marriage:

- Children tend to do better when their parents are married. Although most children raised by single parents do fine, children are generally better off when their biological parents are married, live in the same home and have a healthy marriage. Why? One reason is that married parents tend to earn higher incomes. Having more money reduces stress and makes it easier for parents to spend time with and nurture children.
- Often, getting married makes economic sense. Two can live more cheaply than one.
- Married parents also tend to get more support from their extended families and friends.

- Married people get certain legal rights, for example:
 - They can get covered by their spouse’s insurance plan.
 - Their spouse can give consent for medical treatments.
 - They have a right to inherit their spouse’s property even without a will.

- Marriage often brings companionship, long-term friendship, increased health and happiness, comfort and care over the long haul.

Here are some factors that make getting married more challenging:

- Having a child from a former relationship (and having to pay child support if the child doesn’t live with you)
- Unresolved issues of mistrust or infidelity in the relationship
- Feeling pressure to marry because of an unplanned pregnancy
- Having limited education and limited job skills
- Addictions to drugs, alcohol, or gambling
- High levels of conflict in the relationship
- One or both partners has a problem with anger or violence
- Money issues

Things to work out before getting married:

Expectations: Discuss what you expect from one another. Topics to consider include: how you will communicate and solve problems; how you will talk about relationship “deal breakers”; how you will manage household tasks; whether both of you fully understand the commitment you are making; how many kids you’ll have together, and so on.

Money Management: Discuss your attitudes about money. Topics to consider include: whether to keep your money separate or together; budgeting; how you will keep track of and pay bills; saving and putting other things in order (insurance, wills, etc.).

Pre-Marital Skills Education/Counseling: There is so much to talk about and work through before getting married. Most couples either don't take the time or don't know how to tackle all of these important topics. Taking a premarital education class from a minister or other trainer can be very helpful. Premarital education usually helps couples discuss their communication styles, attitudes about money and other topics to better prepare them for marriage. Occasionally, couples recognize during premarital education that they should not get married. This can be a good result, too. The state of Texas strongly encourages couples to attend a premarital education class that lasts at least four hours in the year before getting married.

MARRIAGE FACTS AND FICTION QUIZ

Most of us think we know quite a lot about marriage, right? Just standing in line at the grocery checkout line is education about marriage — which celebrity is marrying, which celebrity is divorcing . . . you get the picture. The following information doesn't usually make it into the tabloids, but it's pretty newsworthy in its own right — and a lot more useful when it comes to your own knowledge about who is getting married, how marriage impacts adults and children, and what some of the key ingredients are for a successful marriage.

Read the following statements and decide if it is FACT or FICTION. Circle FACT if you think the statement is true, and circle FICTION if you think it's false. *The answers and background information are located at the end of the lesson.*

1. **FACT OR FICTION:** In the years since 1970 people have been getting married at younger and younger ages.
2. **FACT OR FICTION:** The majority of adults are married.
3. **FACT OR FICTION:** Of those adults who are married, most have been married more than once.
4. **FACT OR FICTION:** Over the last 20 years the divorce rate has continued to climb.
5. **FACT OR FICTION:** In 2002, the divorce rate in Texas was lower than the national average.
6. **FACT OR FICTION:** Having a baby while she's single has no impact on whether or not a young woman will ever get married.
7. **FACT OR FICTION:** Married people are no happier than single or divorced people.
8. **FACT OR FICTION:** Married couples who are having relationship struggles should not count on having a child as a way to solve relationship issues.
9. **FACT OR FICTION:** Married people are physically healthier than those who aren't married.
10. **FACT OR FICTION:** When you get married, you tend to have fewer financial resources than when you're single.
11. **FACT OR FICTION:** Most young couples who aren't married at the time they have a child do not plan to get married in the future.

12. **FACT OR FICTION:** Young mothers will typically marry the fathers of their children even when they don't trust them.
13. **FACT OR FICTION:** Couples were more likely to follow through on their plan to marry (one year later) when the fathers had continued their education beyond high school.
14. **FACT OR FICTION:** In one study it was found that women were more likely to end their relationship because of ongoing conflicts.
15. **FACT OR FICTION:** On average, children are no better off when parents are married than when parents are single or living together.
16. **FACT OR FICTION:** When parents divorce, children don't suffer any significant negative consequences.
17. **FACT OR FICTION:** The most important indicator of whether a couple has a good marriage is the lack of conflict in that marriage.

ANSWERS

1. **Fiction.** It's actually the reverse. People are delaying the time that they get married. In 1970 the average age for women was 20.8 and for men it was 23.2. In 2000 the average age for women was 25.1 and for men 26.8. (Census Bureau Reports, U.S. Adults Postponing Marriage, 6/2001.)

2. **Fact.** Nearly 60 percent of adults are married – 10 percent are separated or divorced, 7 percent are widowed, 19 percent have never been married and 6 percent are living with a partner. Marital status varies greatly among racial/ethnic groups. Approximately 61 percent of white adults are married, 58 percent of Hispanic adults, and 38 percent of Black adults. (National Center for Health Statistics, Marital Status and Health: United States, 1999-2002, December 2004)

3. Fiction. Most adults have married only once – 74 percent of Hispanics, 70 percent of Whites, 65 percent of Blacks, and 84 percent of Asians and Pacific Islanders. (National Center for Health Statistics, Marital Status and Health: United States, 1999-2002, December 2004)

4. Fiction. Although many people believe the divorce rate continues to increase, it has, in fact, been declining since 1981 for people born in 1955 or later. (National Center for Health Statistics, cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/divorce.htm.)

5. Fact. Nationwide, the divorce rate was 5.2 per 1,000 in 2002. That same year in Texas, the rate was 3.9. Laredo, Texas had one of the lowest divorce rates in the entire country. (Division of Vital Statistics, National Center for Health Statistics, cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/divorce.htm)

6. Fiction. Women who have a child without being married have a 40 percent lower likelihood of ever getting married. (Levin-Epstein, J. Center for Law and Social Policy, To Have and to Hold: Congressional Vows on Marriage and Sex, March 2005)

7. Fiction. Married people are more likely to say that they are happy with their lives in general and less likely to say they are “not too happy.” They also report less depression and anxiety than people who are single or living with a partner. (Waite, L. and Gallagher, M. The Case for Marriage. Doubleday, 2000)

8. Fact: The birth of a child often affects marital harmony and requires adjustment. Because newborn children have so many needs, one or both parents must spend time taking care of the child. The time they spend taking care of their newborn reduces the time they can spend together doing couple things. Spending less time alone as a couple can create challenges for even the healthiest marriages. (Belsky, J. Transition to Parenthood. *Medical Aspects of Human Sexuality*, 20, 56-59 (1986).)

9. Fact. Married adults are less likely than other adults to be in fair or poor health; to suffer from serious psychological distress; or to smoke, drink heavily or be physically inactive. However, married men are more likely to be overweight or obese than other men. (Marital Status and Health: US, 1999-2002, www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/ad/ad351.pdf).

10. Fiction. In general, both men and women tend to be better off financially when they marry because they have access to their partner's current and future income. They also have better access to extended family. When women are married to men with decent incomes, they generally are better off financially than their non-married sisters. If they separate or divorce, their situations are often worse. (The Case for Marriage) Married men often earn 10-40 percent more than single men and the longer they stay married the fatter their paychecks get. Why? Married men tend to lead more settled lives. They miss work less often and are more likely to be focused on supporting their families. For couples who have limited employment skills and low incomes, getting married will not necessarily lead to an improved financial situation unless one or both people can get decent jobs. (Sigle-Rushton, W and McLanahan S., *"For Richer or Poorer,"* Center for Research on Child Wellbeing – Working Paper #01-17-FF, July 2001.)

11. Fiction. An important study, called the Fragile Families and Child Well Being study, found that 80 percent of unmarried parents are in a romantic relationship at the time of their child's birth. Over two-thirds of both mothers and fathers think their chances of marrying the other parent are 50-50 or better at the time of their child's birth. (Carlson, M., McLanahan S., England, P., and Devaney, B. January 2005. Building Strong Families In Brief. *"What We Know about Unmarried Parents: Implications for Building Strong Families Programs."* Washington, DC: Mathematica Policy Research)

12. Fiction. This is a powerful finding from the Fragile Families study and other work with similar populations. A woman's attitude about whether "her" man can be trusted is a big factor in the breakup of the relationship. Women in the study who had trouble trusting "their" men were less likely to stay in the relationship, to live together or to get married. (The Fragile Family and Child Well Being Study, www.icpsr.umich.edu/cgi-bin/exit?path=DSDR&url=http://www.fragilefamilies.princeton.edu/data.asp)

13. Fact. Couples are more likely to follow through on their plan to marry when the man has education beyond high school because education is a factor that makes men more attractive as a possible husband.

14. Fiction. In truth, men are more likely to end a relationship, and avoid commitment and marriage when there are high levels of conflict. (The Fragile Family and Child Well Being Study, www.icpsr.umich.edu/cgi-bin/exit?path=DSDR&url=http://www.fragilefamilies.princeton.edu/data.asp)

15. Fiction. Although most children raised by single parents end up doing just fine, children are generally better off when their biological parents are married, living in the same home and have a healthy marriage. Having more money can reduce stress and make it easier for parents to spend time with and nurture children. Married parents also tend to have supportive family ties and connections to extended family. Marriage can provide family stability. Parental conflict has a negative impact on children regardless of whether the parents are married or not. (Parke, Mary, *Are Married Parents Really Better for Children? What Research Says About the Effects of Family Structure on Child Well-Being*, 2003, CLASP, www.clasp.org/publications/Marriage_Brief3.pdf)

16. Fiction. While it is true that most children of divorce are able to effectively deal with the disruption divorce brings to their lives, divorce impacts children's behavior, emotional state, and academic performance. Adjustment problems may be due to: lack of positive contact with the non-custodial parent, loss of family income, and a less positive relationship with the custodial parent. In some cases, disruption and conflict in the marriage prior to the divorce contributes heavily to the child's problems. Children seem to do better when they can continue to live in a home that is financially secure, and have parents who respond to their emotional needs. (National Association of School Psychologists [NASP] Communiqué, Vol. 32, #3, November 2003, "*The Effects of Divorce on Children*" by Alec Brown, Ellie Young & Melissa Allen)

17. Fiction. All married couples experience conflict from time to time. Although some couples have more conflict than others, the amount of conflict is not necessarily associated with the relationship's success. Rather,

what is most important is how a couple handles conflict when it arises. Specifically, one of the best predictors of marital success is the way a couple communicates during times of conflict. Even the happiest couples occasionally use negative communication. However, negative communication is problematic when it is excessive, when it snowballs, and when a couple is unable to stop the negative communication once it starts. In a successful relationship, negative communication is contained and it is typically balanced by positive communication and by other positive relationship interactions. (Sanford, Keith, Baylor University, Department of Psychology and Neuroscience, www3.baylor.edu/~Keith_Sanford/resources%202.htm).

In Lesson Two we will talk about conflict and fighting in a relationship. We will share some ideas and skills for handling and resolving conflict within a marriage or romantic relationship.

LESSON TWO: HOW TO FIGHT RIGHT

Some people think that perfect couples never disagree. But every couple gets into arguments. It may sound crazy, but arguments and disputes do not have to drive couples apart. The secret is learning to “fight right.”

Three Fighting Styles

- **Yelling:** Some couples may yell at each other when they have fights.
- **Avoiding:** Some couples avoid fights as much as possible.
- **Listening:** Some couples listen and understand each other even when they don't agree.

The Yellers, Avoiders, and Listeners all have an equal chance of staying together.

What? How?

When the “stay together” couples have arguments, they:

- **Stop** fights before they get out of control.
- Do not completely avoid dealing with a tough problem before it gets out of hand.
- Continue to respect each other despite difficult issues.

So the YELLING thing isn’t working?

Out-of-control arguments can end with partners making nasty remarks that cut deep and hurt the relationship. The things people say “in the heat of the moment” may not even be how they really feel about their partner.

DID THAT HURT?

Here are some types of demeaning and hurtful behavior.

- **hostile name-calling**
“Hey stupid, I’m talking to you.”
- **hostile humor**
“Hey, thanks for not picking me up on time. You know how I love to wait.”
- **put-downs**
“At least I have a job!”
- **mockery**
“Aw, poor baby, you’re tired. . . . Well, so am I!”
- **any type of behavior that makes your partner feel less about him or herself.**

When couples fight, they need to know when to stop, when to soften their voices, and when to change the direction of the argument.



HOW DO YOU STOP?

One or both of the partners must choose to back off by:

- Changing the tone of his or her voice.
 - Calling a time out, or using sentences that have “I” instead of “you” are helpful.
 - Saying something that changes the mood, stops the fight from getting overheated. This sudden change of behavior can often stop a fight before it gets out of control.
 - What are some things you can say or do to stop an argument from turning into a bad fight?
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IT’S NOT HIDE AND SEEK

Some couples may avoid dealing with certain issues. This is their style and they’re okay with that. With other couples, one person brings up issues and the other withdraws or avoids the situation. Some couples get stuck in a game of hide and seek. The more one person wants to talk about it (seek), the more the other wants to avoid it (hide). The “avoider” may leave, become quiet, or easily agree to stop the conversation.



TIRED OF HIDE-AND-SEEK?

A couple needs to understand that the actions of one partner have an impact on the other person. The couple will need to think about better ways of reacting to each other. The “avoider” could ask for time to think, but set a specific time to talk about the issue later. The other partner takes the hint and backs off.

ALL WE NEED IS R-E-S-P-E-C-T

Successful couples disagree, but they still respect each other. When the couple doesn't see eye to eye, they can still listen to and care about the other person's thoughts. They each try to "see" the other person's point of view.



Tempted to read your partner's mind?

Don't! Another important thing to remember is that mind reading is disrespectful. Give your partner the chance to speak for him or herself. You don't have to guess what's on his or her mind. Ask and listen.

YOU'VE GOT TO WANT TO CHANGE

How you say something is just as important as what you say. Non-verbal signals or messages are things like vocal tone, loudness, facial expressions and body movements. They make up how you say something. Negative verbal and non-verbal behavior hurts relationships. The feelings of closeness and connection fade away as feelings of frustration, loneliness and isolation come in.



There is hope! A couple can change these damaging patterns by taking the time and making the effort to find new ways of interacting. How you communicate sets the mood for how you interact. In the next section you will learn about communication and listening skills.

LESSON THREE: LEARNING TO LISTEN

Communication with your partner involves talking, but listening is just as important.

ACTIVE LISTENING... HEARING VS. LISTENING

Listening is more than just hearing. Hearing means that sound is being transmitted to the brain; listening means that the sound, what is being heard, is understood. You have to be willing to listen to your partner's point of view and try to understand it. That does not mean you have to agree with your partner 100 percent. It just means that you have to try hard to see your partner's point of view.

IN MY PARTNER'S SHOES?

Showing that you “get it” can be as simple as saying, “Yeah,” or “I hear you,” or even just nodding your head. You might not like what your partner says, but you should try to understand what he or she is saying. Put yourself in your partner's shoes.

That sounds hard. When talking about difficult issues, it will not be easy to



stop yourself from interrupting your partner. But the key is to listen and show that you are listening. Remember, one at a time . . . each partner can take turns at listening and speaking. The focus should be on listening to the message.

MIRRORS AND TAKING TURNS. After your partner says his or her piece, repeat the message you heard back to the speaker. Just like looking in the mirror, the two parts should be the same—the message sent and the message received.

If what you heard doesn't match what the speaker meant, the speaker can explain again. Once the two messages agree, then the speaker becomes the listener, and the listener becomes the speaker.



EXAMPLE: Look at the differences between “hearing without listening” and “active listening.”

HEARING WITHOUT LISTENING

JESSICA: I sure am tired tonight.

SAM: You can rest tomorrow since it's Saturday.

JESSICA: It would be nice to rest tonight.

SAM: After we get home from the movie you can rest.

Sam did not paraphrase the message. He's not seeing Jessica's point of view.

ACTIVE LISTENING

JESSICA: I sure am tired tonight.

SAM: Sounds like you don't feel like going out tonight.

JESSICA: Do you mind? It'd be nice to relax at home.

SAM: No, that sounds good to me. How about renting a movie and watching it at home?

Sam repeated the message back to Jessica to see if he understood what she was really trying to say. After Jessica confirmed that is what she meant, Sam responded.

A good way of repeating a message back is to:

- Keep the “repeat” brief.
- Reflect only the most important parts of the speaker’s message.
- Focus on the content of the message.
- Don’t challenge or change the speaker’s message.

No one expects you to talk like this in everyday conversation. But active listening skills are a useful way to talk about difficult issues.

Ground Rules

Knowing the “game plan” can give the parties a safer way to disagree and communicate. Set up some ground rules before the conversation goes too far.

Sample ground rules

- Each person will take turns listening and speaking.
- Speaker will give short messages and allow the listener to repeat the message.
- Speaker will use “I...” statements instead of “You...” statements.
- Listener will briefly repeat the message until it matches up with what the speaker meant to say.



Using these skills won’t be easy at first, but keep practicing them. It’s worth the effort. So, don’t give up!

LESSON FOUR: EXPRESSING YOURSELF

Most of the time when we want to let someone know how we feel, we send a “you” message. “*You make me angry,*” “*Why don’t you ever talk to me?*” and “*You hurt me.*” These types of “you” messages are seen by the other partner as put-downs.

How is the message a put-down?



The message is seen as an attack. When we feel blamed, accused or attacked we will usually do two things: defend ourselves and then counterattack. This negative cycle can go on until very hurtful things are said.



“I” is better than “you.”

By using sentences that start with “I” you own up to your feelings. There are not any put-downs, arguments are avoided and issues can be dealt with more calmly. A good way for sending “I” messages is: Say what you’re **feeling** about a **situation or behavior** and then say what the result is, the **consequence**.



EXAMPLE of “I” statements:

I **get angry** when you are home all day on Friday while I am at work **and the laundry doesn’t get done**. Then we have to do it during the weekend.

- **Feeling:** the speaker feels angry
- **Situation/Behavior:** the laundry isn't being done
- **Consequence:** laundry has to be done on the weekends and the speaker feels resentful.

“I feel” not “I think”

“I” statements work better when they start with **feeling** words. If you can replace the words “I think” for the words “I feel” in a sentence, and it still makes sense, then you probably have expressed a thought and not a feeling. Express your feeling.

Feeling Words: Positive Feelings

Happy • Good • Loved • Tingly • Glad • Warm

Feeling Words: Negative Feelings

Hurt • Mad • Ignored • Sad • Cold • Jealous

Remember to keep it short when bringing up an issue. You want your partner to have the chance to repeat back what he or she heard. Also, make sure the issue is worth talking about and that it is the right time to bring it up.

What about all the good stuff?

You can also use “I” statements to talk about the positive things in your relationship. Sharing positive thoughts with each other is an important part of healthy relationships.

- Remind yourself of what is right in your relationship.
- Remember the good times.
- Think of the things that your partner does well.



Everyone likes to hear an honest and sincere compliment or thank-you from time to time. So share your positive thoughts about each other to each other!

Example of validating messages:

I feel really good when you hug me because

I need to be reminded of your love.

- **Feeling:** really good
- **Situation/Behavior:** when you hug me
- **Consequence:** I am reminded of your love

Sometimes even just a smile when your partner says something that pleases you might be enough.



Don't give up! At first, your partner may be shocked to hear validating messages. He or she might even respond negatively. But don't give up. You might be surprised to see (or hear) your partner beginning to do the same!

Being positive is hard work. It is much easier to find what is wrong. But stop yourself when you begin to think bad thoughts.

Communication with style

It is helpful to remember that each person has his or her own style of communicating. As a couple, understanding how you each like to express yourself can help you both create a style of communication that works for both of you.

LESSON FIVE: MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

Most people want to be with someone they can count on . . . emotionally, financially and physically. When needs and wants are not met as a person expects, a person can feel like she or he is “falling out of love.”

What each person expects from the other has a big influence on how each person feels about the relationship.

THE BIG THREE: SEX, HOUSEWORK AND MONEY

A partner walks into a relationship with his or her own ideas on these three big issues. It is common for couples to argue about how often to make love, who should take care of housework, who should be the bread-winner, and how money should be spent.

Countless other things may cause conflict, but “the big three” are most common. One partner may think that the other person is making a big deal out of nothing. One partner may feel that the other is being disrespectful when the problem is not taken seriously.

IT'S THE LITTLE THINGS

Expectations can include small everyday things like who replaces the empty roll of toilet paper or who gets to decide what to watch on TV. These “little things” can turn a dispute into a horrible fight over issues of power, commitment and caring.

Here are four warning signs:

1. One or both of you keep score.
2. You both want to avoid the issue.
3. Those little annoyances or issues blow up.
4. You talk about the same thing repeatedly and never face or solve the hidden issue.

SO WHERE DO THESE EXPECTATIONS COME FROM?

Expectations about small and big issues come from many sources:

1. FAMILY OF ORIGIN

Some families are not comfortable showing affection; other families enjoy giving hugs and kisses.

2. CULTURAL OR SOCIAL INFLUENCES

Images from television, movies and other media can influence our expectations about relationships.

3. BELIEF SYSTEM OR SPIRITUALITY

It may be more difficult for a couple to have a shared point of view if their basic, core beliefs are different.

4. EXPERIENCES FROM PAST RELATIONSHIPS

A person may have a hard time trusting a current partner if his or her last partner or spouse cheated.



KEYS TO HANDLING EXPECTATIONS

- Be aware of what you expect.
- Many expectations work automatically – we don't even think of them.
- When conflicts occur it may be because neither partner knows what the other expects.

Think about your expectations

- Be fair about what you expect.
- Unrealistic expectations can lead to conflict.
- When one partner refuses to change an unreasonable, unfair expectation, the relationship may end.

EXAMPLE: Perhaps one partner assumes that



there will never be an issue over who cleans the house or pays the bills.



EXAMPLE: A person may think that his or her new partner should stop hanging out with all previous friends entirely.

BE CLEAR IN WHAT YOU EXPECT

Have you told your partner, at the right time and place, what your expectations are? You should let your partner know what you need or expect before an argument happens.



EXAMPLE: During a fight is not the time to voice an expectation and expect your partner to understand or agree with it.

LESSON SIX: THE BALANCING ACT

Do you ever feel like there are not enough hours in the day? Work, family, and friends all keep people busy. It is common for couples to wonder, *“When do we make time for just the two of us?”*

The answer might be easier than you think.

TIME FOR US

By finding at least 15 minutes together each day to share what is on their minds, couples can build bridges to a strong and healthy relationship. You may feel as though you are ignoring other family members or that you don't have enough money to do anything special with your partner. Time together may be as simple as shutting off the TV and focusing on each other. Be creative—think of ways to make “couple time” part of your life.

TIME FOR ME, MYSELF AND I

It is very important that we all make time for ourselves, to participate in activities that build up our self-esteem. If we fail to do this and fail to think positively about ourselves, we become boring, closed off and dull. We can become defensive whenever we interact with others — always trying to defend ourselves instead of taking responsibility for our actions.

The good news is that finding time for yourself can mean taking as little as 15 minutes out of your day to do something you enjoy. You might think about going for a jog or working out; you might think about flipping through your favorite magazine while riding the bus or car pooling; or even just getting up 15 minutes earlier to do something you like.

The balancing act is to take care of our family, work, friends and relationships, and at the same time remember to take care of ourself. When we feel good about who we are, it makes it much easier to take care of everyday things.

PROBLEM-SOLVING

Sometimes we get so caught up with our everyday responsibilities and activities that we don't take the time to recognize the problems in our relationship. We don't take the time to talk about it or solve it as a team. Instead the problem eats away at the relationship.

Usually when people talk about problems, they like to go straight to talking about a solution. But, that is too fast—good problem-solving does not move quickly. It starts with talking about the problem before thinking about solutions.

Each person needs to use listening skills and “I” statements until both agree that the problem has been fully discussed. If it is a large problem, you may need to break the problem into parts.

Once the problem has been completely discussed, make sure each person understands what is trying to be solved and what the end result should be. Now you are ready to brainstorm solutions.

After you come up with as many ideas and solutions as possible, it is time to come to an agreement. You and your partner may need to compromise



– neither partner getting exactly what he or she wants, but each partner getting something close to what he or she needs. Finally, set a specific time in the future to discuss how everything is working out.

REMEMBER:

1. Discuss the problem
2. Brainstorm
3. Compromise
4. Come back to it in the future to see if it is working.

LESSON SEVEN: COMMITMENT

A friend is someone that you can be comfortable with, open up to, have fun with and count on. Having a friend is often listed by couples as the single most important goal in their relationship. What happens when couples start out as friends, but find that friendship disappearing?

Stumbling blocks

- Constant conflict eats away at a friendship. When you have an argument, give yourselves a chance to cool off and refocus on the positive things about your relationship. It can take time before you feel like being friends again.
- It is also damaging when a partner takes personal information shared during private moments and uses it as a verbal weapon.

- Couples who have been together for a long time may think there is no need to share thoughts with each other. Keep in mind that we change constantly. Share your thoughts and feelings with your partner.

THE C WORD: COMMITMENT

Commitment can mean many things: “hanging in there,” trust, devotion, sacrifice, love, fidelity, etc. It is the glue that holds couples together. Most couples will have regrets about their relationship at some point in their lives, and may even think about separating. Couples can move beyond those moments if they think of themselves as a team and are open to sharing what they want out of life and their relationship.

STRENGTHENING YOUR FRIENDSHIP

Make time to talk as friends.

Get away from the telephone and other interruptions and talk to each other. It may be helpful to set ground rules, such as promising to discuss only positive things. Don't forget to be an active listener.

Create fun in your relationship.

Couples need to share hopes, plans and dreams. Think of different ways that you can have fun. Every now and then do things with a group of friends or family.

Compliment each other.

This can also help boring or tense relationships become more enjoyable. Everyone loves to feel encouraged or complimented by the one they love.

Think about your sex life.

Tension can spoil lovemaking, so try to protect those times from conflict. Couples who communicate — through spoken and body language

— about their desires have the best sexual relationships. These couples view themselves as a team — giving and receiving in ways that are important to both.

WORK AT MAKING IT BETTER.

Some couples stay together regardless of their satisfaction with their relationship. They may not be happy, but they choose to stick it out. It “may be for moral reasons — they may feel that divorce is wrong — or for the children.



In these instances, couples can improve their relationship if they commit themselves to it, but it will be hard work. Some couples may believe their fate is a lifetime of unhappiness, but change is possible with time and attention to the relationship.

HOW CAN WE WORK ON COMMITMENT?

- Learning new skills
- Working as a team
- Having self-control (restraint)
- Working on problem-solving
- Keeping the friendship alive
- Being dedicated



Learning individually or together as a couple can reinforce your relationship-building. Couple commitment occurs with restraint and dedication. Restraint means stopping to think before doing something that might really harm your relationship. Dedication is making the relationship grow.

A good relationship means working as a team, working out your differences, and enjoying each other. It is a matter of will.

BENEFITS OF MARRIAGE

Marriage is good for moms, dads and kids.

- Studies show that married moms have less conflict with their children than do single moms.
- Kids whose parents get and stay married see their dads more frequently and are closer to both their parents than kids whose parents were never married or who divorced.
- Compared to unmarried parents, married parents tend to enjoy more supportive relationships with one another. Their relationship is healthier and less violent than those dating or who live together without marriage.
- Children are more likely to experience persistent poverty, and at least one year of dire poverty, when parents do not marry and stay married.
- Married men tend to earn more than single men and women experience higher living standards when in a stable and healthy marriage.

- Studies show that young teens living with their married parents are less likely to experiment with tobacco or alcohol or illegal drugs.
- Kids whose parents get and stay married are more likely to achieve higher levels of academic success, better grades, not be held back and stay in school.

Marriage won't always be easy but if you hang in there, communicate and grow together, it'll be worth it!

HELPFUL HINTS:

- **Sharing is Caring:** set aside a certain time each day to share positive thoughts, feelings and wants with each other.
- **No judges allowed:** avoid evaluating your partner's feelings.
- **"I" is better than "you":** speak for yourself, not for your partner. Use "I . . ." instead of "you . . ."



EXAMPLE:

- "I really like it when you make me laugh."
- "You never take anything seriously."
- I *am* listening, right? – Listening is more than just hearing what is being said, it means understanding what is being said.
- Need a breather? Call a time out – Whenever one partner does not want to continue the discussion say, "Time out." That way neither partner feels trapped. You can set another time to continue.
- What's going on today? – Focus on the present.
- Don't forget your skills – Remember that maintaining a healthy relationship is a process. Relationships change over time. New skills are needed at different phases, and old ones need to be continually sharpened.

LESSON EIGHT: FOUR COUPLES CONSIDERING MARRIAGE

The decision to marry is complicated, full of excitement, fears, anxiety, expectations, and questions – like:

- Will this improve our relationship?
- How will getting married affect our finances?
- What about common law – is it just as good as regular marriage?
- Why not just live together – wouldn't that be easier?

If you've gotten this far through the CoupleTalk curriculum, you're probably thinking pretty seriously about commitment and marriage. The following stories describe some young couples trying to decide about marriage. You may find these stories helpful in thinking about your own decision. We've included a handy guide to the legal steps for getting married in Texas to help you through that part of each story.

SCENARIO #1: Christopher and Emily

Christopher, 23, and Emily, 21, have a one-year old son together and are living in their own apartment. They had talked about getting married when Emily became pregnant with their son, but decided to put it off until Christopher received his associate's degree in computer science and they paid off their credit card bills. They wanted to have a big wedding and reception with all their friends and family. Christopher has a steady job, but is still another year and a half away from finishing his course work. And with all the baby expenses, Christopher and Emily both have more bills to pay now than before they had the baby. Even though everyday stress and problems can cause them to disagree at times, they really enjoy and love each other and want to get married someday. One day when Christopher comes home from a long day of work and school, Emily tells him she's pregnant. With a second baby on the way, Emily's and Christopher's families are constantly telling them to have a small wedding and get married. But Emily still has her heart set on having a big church wedding. Plus, Christopher doesn't have enough money right now to buy Emily the kind of ring he thinks she deserves.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What do you think about Emily and Christopher wanting to put off marriage?
2. What could they do about their wedding / marriage expectations? Should they consider having a smaller wedding like their families suggest?
3. What would be the advantages of getting married?
4. What would be the disadvantages of waiting to marry?

SCENARIO #2: Elisabeth and Brent

Elisabeth and Brent fell in love in 11th grade. They broke up a few times but always got back together. They have such a strong bond and enjoy so many of the same things. Brent believes that no one understands him the way Elisabeth does. He just feels good when he's with her. Elisabeth loves Brent's sense of humor and his generosity. They argue mainly about how much time to spend together. Brent has always loved sports and hanging out with the guys. He also got involved with another girl one time and, although it's never happened again, Elisabeth can't forget it and tends to bring it up when she gets mad. When they graduated, Brent joined the Air Force and Elisabeth enrolled in a local college but continued to live at home. When Brent completed boot camp, Elisabeth was able to go visit him. A few months later, she found out she was pregnant. They decided to get married.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What do Elisabeth and Brent have going for them?
2. What are the advantages of getting married for them?
3. What will make getting married more complicated for them?
4. What do they need to work out before getting married?

SCENARIO #3: Angel and Lena

Angel and Lena are young professionals in their mid 20's. Both earn around \$25,000 a year and each has an apartment. Neither has a lot of extra money so they spend a lot of time at each other's apartments. Both are very satisfied with the relationship and would like for it to be permanent. Angel wants to have a lot of children and Lena isn't sure she even wants to have any. But she feels sure that Angel would be a great guy to have a child with. Recently Lena suggested that they move in together to save money for a nice wedding in a year or two. Angel suggested that they go to the courthouse and get married and then move in together. He thinks they could have a reception later.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What does this couple have going for them?
2. What would be the advantages of getting married right away?
3. What would they need to work out that would help them get off to a good start in marriage?
4. What would be the disadvantages of getting married right away?
5. What do you think they should do and why?

SCENARIO #4: Jeremy and Lilia

Jeremy and Lilia, both in their early 20's, are in a committed relationship. Jeremy has his bachelor's degree in social work. He loves his job but it doesn't pay as much as he would like. He plans to get his MSW because better-paying jobs require a master's degree. Lilia has an entry-level job with a small computer company. The pay is not very good but there are plenty of opportunities to move up. Lilia also has a plan: She wants to get her bachelor's degree in information technology and her company will pay 50 percent of her tuition costs. Right now both Jeremy and Lilia continue to live at home with their parents. Neither of them has been good about saving. Lilia buys a lot of clothes and Jeremy goes clubbing a lot. They both dislike being in this situation, because they can't do what they want and still have to answer to their parents. They are truly best friends and give each other understanding and support whenever times are tough. From time to time, they've talked about getting married but both feel like they should work on some personal goals before they take that big step. Last week, Jeremy and his mother had a big argument about dishes he'd left in the sink. He made up his mind that he was going to move as soon as he could. When Lilia came over that evening, he was combing through the want ads looking for a cheap apartment. She could see how unhappy he was. Lilia said that maybe they should just go ahead and get married. Maybe there was a way for them to work together as a team to help each other accomplish their goals. Jeremy asked Lilia to marry him and they set a date.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What strengths do you see in this relationship?
2. What would Jeremy and Lilia gain from getting married?
3. What are some potential problems they might encounter in their marriage? What can they do to address these problems?
4. What can they do to make sure their marriage gets off to a strong start?
5. What kind of plan can they put together to so they both get to accomplish their individual goals?

REQUIREMENTS FOR GETTING MARRIED IN TEXAS

- **Where you get a marriage license** – You and your partner must go to a county clerk’s office in person to apply for a marriage license. For a list of county offices, you can visit:
<http://www.county.org/counties/txcounties.asp#list>
- **ID requirements** – A valid form of ID such as a driver’s license, certified copy of your birth certificate, U.S. passport, military ID card, or your Social Security number
- **Age requirements** – You must be 18 years of age to marry on your own. If you are between 16 and 18, you must have parental consent or a court order granting permission to marry. If you are younger than 16, you must have a court order granting permission to marry.
- **Residency requirements** – You do not have to be a resident of Texas.
- **Premarital education** – Couples are encouraged to attend a pre-marital education course of at least 4 hours. It should be completed in the year preceding application for a marriage license.
- **Waiting period** – There is a 72-hour waiting period from the time of getting a marriage license to the marriage ceremony. This time period may be waived for a member of the armed forces or by a judge.
- **Fees** – Fees for marriage licenses range from approximately \$30–\$45 by county. Most counties require that the fee be paid in cash.

- **Who can perform a marriage in Texas?** – A licensed or ordained Christian minister or priest; Jewish rabbi; a person who is an officer of a religious organization and who is authorized by the organization to conduct a marriage ceremony; any active or retired justice or judge of the court in Texas.
- **What about common law marriage?** – Texas recognizes informal or common law marriages that meet the following requirements: the man and woman are both 18 or older; the man and woman are not currently married to someone else; the man and woman agreed to be married and after the agreement they lived together in Texas as husband and wife; and they represented to others that they were married. Informal marriages may be registered at the county clerk's office on a form provided by the Vital Statistics Unit of the Department of State Health Services.

COUPLE TALK ACTIVITY CARDS

FOR YOUR CONVENIENCE: *These reference notes have been printed on cardstock and perforated for easier use.*

Couple Talk

Enhancing Your Relationship

ACTIVITY CARD: HOW TO FIGHT RIGHT

Note: If your partner is unwilling to participate in these activities, accept that decision. You may want to share your new knowledge with your partner at times when it seems appropriate, but do not criticize or blame your partner for not doing these activities. It is possible for an individual to gain from this information even if the partner chooses not to participate. How you handle disagreements and conflicts is just as important to a relationship as how much you love each other.

PART I:

Whenever a hard issue comes up between you and your partner do you feel overwhelmed? Do you feel your body get tense? Learn to recognize when you first become flooded with strong emotions, and make a very conscious attempt to calm yourself down. It will not be easy, but try to find ways that work for you. If you learn to recognize this feeling and have a plan in place, you will be able to short-circuit harmful ways of reacting.

HELPFUL EXAMPLES

- Take deep breaths.
- Try muscle relaxation by purposely tensing and then relaxing your muscles.
- Take time-outs. It may seem artificial at first to say to your partner that you need an intermission when a tough issue comes up. Let your partner know that you are not avoiding the topic – you just need a time-out to be able to settle down to hear your partner's point of view.

PART II:

The following questions are designed to help you and your partner better understand how you communicate with each other. Answer how you truly feel, not how you think you should answer. After each of you has answered the questions individually, designate a time to compare and discuss your answers together. If your partner is not willing to discuss these questions, accept his or her decision and refrain from pushing your partner to participate.

A. How do you communicate with your partner?

Note: Successful couples can have many ways of communicating with each other (i.e. yelling, avoiding, listening). What are the keys to their success? They are able to stop fights before they really get out of control. They also show respect to each other, even in conflict.

B. How does your partner communicate? Explain.

C. Do you respect each other's opinions? Explain.

D. Do you feel valued by your partner? Give an example.

E. Do you enjoy each other? Explain.

Charlotte Shoup Olsen & Trudy Rise, *"Couple Talk: Enhancing Your Relationship,"* Kansas State University, January 1997.

Enhancing Your Relationship

ACTIVITY CARD: LEARNING TO LISTEN

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Effective listening takes patience and hard work. Common listening problems: Listening with “half an ear,” acting as a judge instead of a listener to the whole story, jumping to conclusions, thinking about what to say next, tuning out ideas you disagree with, talking too much.

PART I: GROUND RULES

Sit down as a couple and take a few minutes to agree on some ground rules to follow when you are having a discussion. It is best to have a few specific rules that you agree on rather than lots of general ones. The more you have, the harder it is to remember them. The key is to make rules that you both can support!

Example: “Each of us gets a turn to share our feelings.”

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

PART II:**WHO HAS THE FLOOR?**

As you begin to work on your listening skills, try a visual cue that offers a reminder when it is your turn to talk or listen. When a tough issue comes up, give the speaker a ball or key (or some object that is agreeable to both of you) to hold while he or she is talking. When the speaking partner is finished and is satisfied with the other partner's paraphrasing, pass the object to the other partner and listen while he or she talks.

Charlotte Shoup Olsen & Trudy Rise, *"Couple Talk: Enhancing Your Relationship,"*
Kansas State University, January 1997.

Enhancing Your Relationship

ACTIVITY CARD: EXPRESSING YOURSELF

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It's important to take ownership for your feelings by using "I" statements rather than "you did this . . ." statements.

Good "I" messages contain three parts:

- A feeling.
- A situation or behavior.
- A need or consequence.

PART I:

"I" STATEMENT PRACTICE

Choose any subject that interests you and tell your partner about it for a few minutes. Examples might include:

- A hobby
- A favorite movie
- A current event

After listening to the information, give your partner the chance to paraphrase what you said. Let him or her know whether the message you sent was received as you intended. If not, clarify what you said and have your partner paraphrase it again. Repeat until the paraphrase is correct, and then switch roles.

PART II:

PRACTICE WITH A MINOR CONFLICT

Repeat the same procedure as in Part I, but choose a topic that causes minor conflict between the two of you. Be willing to practice this activity several times.

PART III:**REVIEW OF A FIGHT**

During the next several days, if you start having a fight with your partner, call a time out and review what is going on. Ask yourself if your verbal and non-verbal communication is causing the fight to escalate. Are you putting your partner down, criticizing, name calling, ignoring or bringing up the past?

Take specific steps to change those patterns of behavior that are not showing respect toward your partner. If the disagreement is extremely heated, do not hesitate to call a time out, think about your behavior, and agree on a later time to return to the discussion.

PART IV:**DIFFERENT WAYS OF COMMUNICATING**

Think about the different ways in which the two of you communicate that might be related to gender and cultural differences. For example, one of you may have been taught to show emotions—the other may have not.

Think about which things cause problems between the two of you and which do not. Be willing to think about those issues that can never be resolved and how you can deal with them. One issue might be differences in how each of you prefers to spend leisure time. How can you deal with this type of issue? How can each of you compromise?

Charlotte Shoup Olsen & Trudy Rise, *“Couple Talk: Enhancing Your Relationship,”*
Kansas State University, January 1997.

Enhancing Your Relationship

ACTIVITY CARD: MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

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Couples expect a lot from their marriage or partnership. Dissatisfaction occurs when expectations are not met. Some of the more common marital problems revolve around sex, housework and money. Effective communication skills can help couples deal with these issues.

PART I:

WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO ME?

Before you start getting upset about a tough issue, ask yourself the following questions.

- Do I really know what I expect?
- Is it reasonable?
- Have I clearly explained it to my partner?
- How have I tried to understand my partner's feelings?

PART II:

A REVIEW OF OUR RULES

The purpose of this activity is to help you recognize the expectations you have in and about your relationship. You will learn to see the difference between rules that you know you practice and "rules" (expectations) that operate automatically (without you thinking about them). You will also recognize the difference between rules that can be openly talked about and those that are unspoken. This activity may take more than one time to complete.

EXAMPLES OF PARTNER RULES:

- One partner writes all the checks and balances the checkbook.
- When one partner cooks the evening meal, the other partner does the dishes.
- One partner initiates affection more often than the other.

AFTER MAKING A LIST OF RULES, ANSWER THE FOLLOWING:

1. Overall, are the rules helpful?
2. Which rules need to be thrown out? Revised? Clarified?
3. Which rules are direct and clear? Which rules have operated subconsciously (without you thinking about them)?
4. How are rules made between us?
5. How can a rule be changed if one partner decides that he or she does not like a rule?
6. As a couple, what do we want to accomplish through the use of these rules?

Charlotte Shoup Olsen & Trudy Rise, *"Couple Talk: Enhancing Your Relationship,"*
Kansas State University, January 1997.

Enhancing Your Relationship

ACTIVITY CARD: THE BALANCING ACT

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Time for yourself is not a luxury, but a necessity. We can't do a good job at nurturing our relationship if we don't take time to take care of ourselves—refresh ourselves. Also, time as a couple is not a luxury, but a necessity. We must nurture our partnership if it is to grow and be healthy.

No one can do it all—balancing is about choices, values, priorities, sacrifices and compromises. It is critical for you and your partner to continually think about tasks that can be shared, simplified or even discarded.

PART I:

Priorities

An important part in achieving balance is setting priorities. Under each heading, list things you would like to accomplish or do.

HOUSEHOLD Example: *Have a clean house at all times.*

RELATIONSHIP Example: *Make time to talk alone with my partner each day.*

PERSONAL Example: *Exercise 15 minutes each day.*

WORK OUTSIDE THE HOME Example: *Get to work on time.*

Write an “E” next to any task you would be willing to get rid of or eliminate, “D” for any you would be willing to delegate, (have someone else do); and “S” for any you would be willing to simplify (reduce). Prioritize the remaining items and compare your list with your partner’s list. Continually ask yourself:

- What is really important in my life?
- What must I have in my life so that I can feel fulfilled?
- To allow our relationship to grow, what might I be able to let go of, delegate or share?

PART II:

EFFECTIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING

Think and talk about one problem in your household that, if improved upon, could help balance your life as a couple. Go through the following problem-solving steps:

STOP: Recognize the problem you and your partner are having. Control your emotions so that you can talk about it.

LOOK & LISTEN: Clearly define the problem. You may find that a large problem needs to be broken into parts.

THINK: Think of all the different possible solutions. When the brainstorming is finished, discuss the advantages and disadvantages of all solutions and describe how you feel about each one.

ACT: Agree on a solution—it may take compromise by both of you. Implement your solution, then check with your partner at a later time to see if the solution is working.

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Kansas State University, January 1997.

Enhancing Your Relationship

ACTIVITY CARD: BEST FRIENDS

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Making time to be together and talk as friends is important. Set some ground rules for these occasions if you need to. Get away from all interruptions, and do not allow yourselves to talk about problems—only talk about things that are mutually interesting. Use listening and speaking skills that nurture your relationship.

PART I:

YOUR PARTNER'S GOOD QUALITIES

Individually, write down ten actions you like your partner to do. Choose these by yourself and do not peek at your partner's list. Here are some examples: hold my hand, call me by a loving name, have patience when I make a mistake, try to cheer me up, thank me for doing something.

1.	2.
3.	4.
5.	6.
7.	8.
9.	10.

Share your lists with each other and think about the following:

- Were there any actions on your partner's list that surprised you?
- Were there any actions on your list that surprised your partner?

PART II:

EMOTIONAL BANK ACCOUNT

Our emotions are like a bank account. If we have more negative emotions (withdrawals) than positive ones (deposits), we are in very bad shape. The next time you are tempted to share a negative emotion, replace it with a positive one instead.

Try to follow the account guideline: "five positives for every negative." Check your emotional balance before you make a negative withdrawal. To help you with your emotional bank account, start each day with a positive comment to your partner and end each day the same way. Positive messages can be relayed in many ways: in person, by phone, by written notes, etc.

PART III:

TIME TOGETHER

Plan time alone with your partner this week. It may be as simple as taking a 30-minute stroll around your neighborhood. Make ground rules to allow yourselves an enjoyable time, such as agreeing to not talk about certain things. Try making this activity a weekly occurrence. You may even want to take turns planning something special for the two of you to do on a regular basis.

Charlotte Shoup Olsen & Trudy Rise, *"Couple Talk: Enhancing Your Relationship,"* Kansas State University, January 1997.