

How to Survive Parenting - The Infant Years

By Mike Witzky

In the previous articles I have looked at the roll of parenting and the challenges that we face. I have stated that the ultimate goal of parenting is to prepare our children to move from one developmental phase to the next, taking on ever increasing responsibilities that will prepare them for the challenges of being an adult. This requires having a good value system and good decision-making skills. Each family will need to determine the value system they want to impart to their children. Everyone has a value system that determines how he or she lives their life. For some it is a formal religious or ethical system of beliefs. For others it is a set of behaviors that reflect a less structured system of values and more of a reaction to life's events. Either way, all families have a set of values that are imparted to their children. These values determine, in large part, the ways children will make decisions. The other component of the process is how and when do parents go about teaching their children the skills of life.

Did you ever get mad at a child for not knowing how to do something, and then realize that they were never shown how to do it? Nothing is more frustrating for both the child and the adult than to expect something from a child that the child is not yet ready for. Knowing when a child is ready to learn new tasks and how they learn at different ages can help structure learning to the abilities of the child. We would never expect a baby to feed itself, nor would we expect a toddler to stay at home and take care of itself all day while we work. So, it is important to know what children are ready to learn at different ages and it all starts at infancy.

What the future holds for a newborn probably depends more on the relationship between parent and child than on any other factor. This parent-infant bonding is partly a natural instinct and largely the quality time mother and father spend with their baby in those first few months. This bonding experience can be different for mothers than for fathers. There is a special relationship that mothers have with the baby since they have just carried the child for 9 months. Still it may not happen just the way a new mother was expecting. New mothers are going through huge hormonal adjustments after giving birth. They are often filled with joy but may also be feeling overwhelmed and or ill prepared for the challenges they now face. It is very important for new mothers to realize that, while you have a lot of natural love for your new baby, this is a new person that you will have to get to know and love. Some days will be better than others. You will need time for yourself and should not feel bad about this. Some mothers experience Postpartum Depression, which can be a normal part of the hormonal adjustment after delivery. Talk to your doctor if you feel this is lasting too long or the depression is getting to be too much. There is a lot that can be done for this and mothers don't have to feel bad if this occurs.

Fathers bonding with infants is somewhat different than the mother's experience. The involvement of fathers in the delivery and even in classes prior to delivery has improved the bonding between father and infant. It's a mistake for fathers to avoid the bonding time of infancy and just wait until the child is older. Fathers should be feeding the baby (if the baby is being bottle fed) changing diapers, cooing and playing just like mom. Fathers should be telling the infant that they love them.

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Some men find it difficult to say this to their children, and their fathers may not have ever said it to them. Break this cycle while the child is an infant and you will find it becomes natural, as the child gets older. Fathers will find this to be very rewarding when the children grow up and say “I love you daddy” and you can say back “I love you too.” This can be especially rewarding with fathers who didn’t have this said to them when they were growing up. You may find that it is easier as you practice this when it is just you and the baby. You will soon be able to say this in front of others, and eventually, it will be a natural and rewarding part of the way you express your love to your children.

If you think your child may benefit from professional assistance, please go to the “*Find a Service Provider*” section of the BHG Web site <http://www.bhg.org> to locate a behavioral healthcare agency in your county.

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