

Fascinating Facets of Infant and Toddler Development*

A NEWBORN baby will double its weight by six months and triple it by the end of the first year. If it carried on at that rate, it would weigh more than a thousand pounds by the time it was five.

The average toddler takes 176 steps a minute.

Six-year-olds laugh an average of 300 times a day. Adults only laugh around 60 times a day.

The brain of a child is much busier than that of an adult. In the brain of a newborn, there are about 2,500 synapses (connections between brain cells) attached to each of the 10 billion neurons or brain cells he possesses. In a two-year-old, this number rises to 15,000 - more than in the brain of adults, who lose some of these connections over time, as the ones that are used less are eventually eliminated.

A BABY is born somewhere in the world every three seconds.

Even before they speak, babies understand words. A baby eight or nine months old may look up at the sound of his name. By one year, he might understand the names of familiar objects, around him (bottle, teddy bear) and common words like "No" or "Bye-bye." Babies learn many things by imitation, and speech is one of them.

A baby born in 1721 in Lubeck, Germany, was said to have been talking at 8 weeks and reading the Bible at one year old!

More importantly, early experiences can determine how proficient a child becomes in his or her native language. Researchers found that when mothers frequently spoke to their infants, their children learned almost 300 more words by age 2 than did their peers whose mothers rarely spoke to them (Huttenlocher et al., 1991; also, Hart & Risley, 1995). Furthermore, studies have suggested that mere exposure to language such as listening to the television or to adults talking amongst themselves provides little benefit.

Rather infants need to interact directly with other human beings, to hear people talking about what they are seeing and experiencing, in order for them to develop optimal language skills. Unfortunately, many parents are under the mistaken impression that talking to babies is not very important because they are too young to understand what is being said.

Children who receive sensitive, responsive care from their parents and other caregivers in the first years of life enjoy an important head start toward success in their lives. The secure relationships they develop with the important adults in their lives lay the foundation for emotional development and help protect them from the many stresses they may face as they grow. Researchers who have examined the life histories of children who have succeeded despite many challenges in their lives consistently found that these people have had at least one stable, supportive relationship with an adult (usually a parent, relative, or teacher) beginning early in life (Werner & Smith, 1992).

Babies are born with all five senses active, and although some are considerably underdeveloped, they rapidly mature as the baby grows. From birth, infants begin learning about the world around them through their senses.

When toddlers are securely attached to their caregivers they are free to explore and take risks knowing that their caregiver is there for them.

They enjoy a safe and challenging play environment that promotes relationships and fosters physical growth and development, curiosity, and exploration. Learning takes place when children are with adults who are carrying out essential tasks. Opportunities for children to help out and to become appropriately independent are fostered. This crucial time of development is strongly influenced by the presence (or lack of) loving interaction, stimulation, and close involvement of parents and caregivers. Much of the way children think and feel about themselves and their world is determined in the first three years of their life. In this formative time the brain is developing a complex system, making connections that will strongly influence how a child can learn, handle stress, thrive, and function in the world.

*These tidbits of information are taken from notes from many conferences and websites. Sources are cited when available. Feel free to research them further!