

Growing Parent®

Tips from the trenches

By Mary Anne Duggan

It seemed like every hand in the city found its way to your belly during the nine months you were pregnant.

You heard every delivery story, some of them more than once, and you came to realize an expectant mother often receives more advice than she asks for.

But if you think your days of being an open target for uninvited opinions ended with the arrival of your baby, think again. Aunt Ethel and that kind woman down the street have only warmed up.

Now they are ready to counsel you on a variety of subjects ranging from what position the baby sleeps in to the bottle vs. the breast.

You will receive more conflicting advice than ever, and of course accept it with motherly patience. What's a new mom to do? Relax and read on.

Compiled here is the best of the best wisdom about raising a happy, healthy baby in the first year while keeping those qualities yourself.

This list has been put together by those most qualified to speak—mothers of young children.

For your sanity:

- **Sleep when the baby sleeps.** This is not as easy as it sounds, but it is crucial. Sleep deprivation is not a pretty thing! You may not be aware you are fatigued until it is too late and

you crash. The housework will wait for you while you take care of your body's need to rest.

- **Don't sweat the small stuff.**

Small stuff is defined as your baby's new habit of spraying out his green beans with delight or his fascination with the lint under the couch. If you expend your energy on insignificant problems, your reserves will be depleted when the big crises pop up.

- **Arrange for a quiet time each day.** Both mother and child benefit from this practice, especially if your child is not fond of actually napping.

A variation on this is to put the baby to bed early enough, if possible, for you and your spouse to have your own quiet time together.

- **Get out!** Combat baby blues by taking walks or joining a play group. Even if your child is too young to play, playgroups can be a great outlet for moms.

For your baby's safety:

- **Don't shake your baby.** It seems obvious, but the daily news reports far too many cases of shaken babies.

If you feel you might shake your baby, put him down and call Parents Anonymous at 1-800-352-0528. Write this number on a card and place it somewhere you could find it quickly. You may think you'll never need it, but you just might.

- **Learn CPR and the Heimlich maneuver.**

Both procedures are performed differently on children than adults. Call your local American Red Cross or American Heart Association chapters for information on classes.

- **Know about foods that can choke.**

Foods high on the list are grapes, hot dogs, and popcorn. Be wary also of small objects a child can choke on. Order a small parts cylinder from Discovery Toys (1-800-426-4777), which will allow you to test to see if objects could potentially choke a child. The roll from toilet tissue will also work as a simple test for size.

- **Watch your child around any kind of water.**

More than just around pools, watch your child around toilets, buckets of water, and of course, bathtubs. Your child's head amounts to about half the size of her weight as an infant. Remember, it only takes a few seconds ...

For your child's emotional growth:

- **Show no sign of hurry.** You nurture your child by giving him time. As he grows, answer the incessant questions, let him do things himself even if it's not the most expedient way, and arrange your daily schedule so that you're not always running. When times are tough, try slowing down. It works wonders.