

FIRST YEAR - A GENTLE BEGINNING, TRUST IN THE WORLD

A GENTLE BEGINNING

PREPARATION OF PARENTS

Research has shown that the extent and quality of care the mother provides the child are strongly conditioned by the way they spend their time together during the first days after birth.

—Silvana Montanaro, M.D.

For the first year of life the infant's world is his or her family. When a couple is getting ready to have a first child they are about to take on the most important role there is. It is strange that so much more time and energy is put into preparing for a career, building a home, or other adult endeavors, than into preparing to be a parent—although it is a far more challenging and long-lasting role. It is best to begin to learn what it means to be a good parent, long before the child is born.

My first response upon hearing about these Montessori 0-3 ideas was quite naturally to defend how we had raised our children, after all "They turned out

all right." However, seeing the wonderful results of using these ideas in many homes we see that there is indeed a better way to begin life—and we are happy to pass on the information.

The earliest moments in life, the first minutes and hours, are the most impressionable for infant and parent. This is the time when the basic instincts of parenting are awakened, and bonding begins. It is the time when the infant develops feelings of trust in those around him, and a feeling that our world is a happy place to be. The single most important element in an infant's environment is the loving wisdom of the adult. Nothing material can substitute for time and attention during these early months and years.

GENTLE FAMILY TOGETHERNESS IN DAILY LIFE

Touching, hugging, skin contact, laughing and singing—these are so very important even in the first few days of life. This is how the newborn and her family develop love and trust, friendship and happiness as a group.

We must remember however that nature has given all humans an inner guide that

provides the wisdom of when to sleep, to wake up, to eat, and to move. Throughout the prenatal months this wisdom has operated successfully and many potential problems can be prevented when the family is careful to observe the infant's needs and not interrupt this process of development.

Here are some examples.

(1) Try not to interrupt sleep or awaken a sleeping infant.

(2) Provide a place, a futon or quilt, in each place in the home where the family spends time, for the infant



With a topponcino I can hold my new baby brother!

SECURITY PILLOW "TOPPONCINO"

We consider this the single most important shower or other gift for the expectant parents. The importance of using the *topponcino* (Italian: to.pon.chi'no) came home to us when the grandfather of our neighbors' tiny infant sat holding his granddaughter securely in his arms and told us that, because of the topponcino, it was the first time in his life he had felt comfortable holding a new grandchild!

The topponcino provides both comfort and security for the newborn as well. It is used to hold, to carry, to hand the baby to another person, or to burp her. When the infant falls asleep in one's arms on a topponcino it is very easy to lay her down without disturbing her all important sleep. It also allows an older sibling to safely and comfortably hold the baby. Even the familiar smell of the constantly-used topponcino comforts the infant.

There are two versions available: The *original topponcino* is made of 100% cotton batting, hand quilted, covered with unbleached cotton muslin and hand tied to keep the batting from moving. It must be carefully hand washed and air dried.



The *foam topponcino* is made of 1/2" thick rubber foam covered with unbleached cotton muslin. It is also hand tied to keep the cover securely in place. The foam topponcino can be put in the washer and air dried.

The topponcino cover is made of fine white cotton with white cotton lace trim. It fits securely, in the European pillowcase style. We suggest having two topponcinos and at least 4 covers for a basic layette. The topponcino is 26.5" (67 cm) long. Made in the USA.

BT230 Original Topponcino	\$34.00
BT232 Foam Topponcino	\$22.00
BA234 Topponcino Cover	\$13.00



to naturally go to sleep, awaken, and practice moving and observing life.

(3) Nurse the infant if possible, when she is hungry, completely emptying one breast and waiting till the child releases, never interrupting or stopping the meal.

(4) Give the mother and baby private time to be together during nursing as often as possible, uninterrupted by the phone, TV, reading, talking to others. The nursing relationship is the model for all intimate relationships throughout life. The infant is not just eating, but is learning about love.

(5) Observe, listen, watch, contemplate . . . get to know what each sound, facial expression, body movement, is trying to express. Contrary to popular opinion the infant does not just "eat and sleep." You will learn that your baby is telling you many things.

(6) Avoid "comfort nursing" and pacifiers that set up an overemphasis on oral gratification. Instead comfort by talking, touching, hugging, singing, playing together. Imagine how you would

feel, what you would look like, if every need and desire were met by eating!

Getting to know the physical, mental, emotional needs of the newborn, and how to meet them, is the greatest gift we can offer. Witnessing the inner guide, the wisdom of our children and *following the child* teaches us about ourselves and about life, and is their gift to us.

CLOTHING AND MATERIALS

Just as the finest natural cotton is used for the baby's *topponcino*, it is best to use it for bedding, play mats, clothing, diapers, and everything else that touches the sensitive newborn skin.

Some babies explore their faces with their hands even before birth and certainly as soon as possible after birth. It is far better to keep fingernails and toenails short, allowing this exploration to continue, than to cover hands and feet. This enables the child to explore familiar and favorite objects with his hands.

It is also important to have hands and feet uncovered in order to learn the skills of turning over, crawling, creeping, pulling up and walking.

If your child exhibits any fear while dressing it is important to slow down and to soothe and gentle the child, to talk to him or her about what you are doing, in a soft voice, rather than to rush through the dressing or changing. This way the child will learn to trust that changing and dressing are safe and enjoyable experiences.

DEVELOPING TRUST IN THE WORLD

It used to be generally agreed that babies were not aware, or that they had no memories of early life. Now we know that the strongest, deepest, and longest—lasting memories are formed at this time. It is common knowledge today that during the first months the child develops his basic attitude toward the world. How can we help a child develop trust from birth on?

For the last few months in utero, the infant has become used to the voices of his immediate family and accustomed to the sound of the mother's heartbeat. In the first weeks after birth the child is reassured by hearing those voices which he has heard during pregnancy, and,



EUROPEAN FLOOR BED FRAME

Only for use in a childproof, safe, environment. It is ideal to give the child, from birth, a twin bed mattress on the floor or his room so that he has room to practice moving, and can see everything in the proper way, and not through "bars." This also makes it possible for the family members to lie in bed with him to read stories, sing, and get to know each other.

However, since a plain mattress is too much of a leap for many new parents and grandparents, this "crib" size bed frame gives a more formal look to the room. It is also valuable for small rooms at home, or in infant care centers where there is not enough space for a twin adult mattress. Using this crib-size *European floor bed frame* gives a child a clear view of the surroundings which makes being in bed, especially waking up, a lot more interesting, and it supports physical and psychological independence because eventually she will be able to get in and out of bed at will to explore the SAFE room.

The frame comes disassembled, with four hardwood plywood polished pieces and hardware.

NOTE: Please be sure that you purchase a crib mattress that will fit, as there are different sizes of mattresses on the market today. The INSIDE dimensions are 28" x 52" x 5." Made in the USA.

BA376

\$160.00

A word about cribs

and playpens: There may be times when an emergency crib or playpen is temporarily necessary for safety, but for the most part spending much time in a crib or playpen can impede mental and physical development and it is BORING.



This is the age for the child to study his world visually in preparation for exploring it physically. This is important work. This can also cause unhappiness as the child's need to see everything is not met.

Seeing the world through bars means that the brain will have to be rewired later, when the child has moved beyond these confines.

It is better to give the child a clear view of his world from the very beginning.

SAFETY NOTE: The environment must be free of hazards in order to follow the ideas on these pages. See mirrors on page 14 and mobiles and toy hangers on pages 2-5, 7.

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while nursing, by the mother's heartbeat.

He will now become more aware of family voices as they sound outside the womb, and of the smells and touch of his parents and siblings. These experiences create security in the child. "Family Only" days ensure this bonding.

Provide soft clothing and soft lights in the first days as the child is getting used to the world outside the womb. The "topponcino" is used to give security when holding the baby, and when handing her to another person. With this gentle handling, the baby gains even more security.

We can learn to listen to the sounds a baby makes, to watch quietly, to observe facial expressions and body movements, to see what the child is trying to tell us, and to get to know this unique human, giving the message that the child is cherished and the world is a safe place.

It is a sad fact that, because of the lack of understanding of the importance of the beginning of life, day care workers and other people who care for infants today are not valued in our culture as they should be. They are underpaid

and under-appreciated. As a result, the profession of caring for the very young often has a very high turnover rate. Babies in these situations bond, are separated, feel rejected, bond again . . . over and over. Think of what the baby learns about trust and security in this situation. Ideally parents make plans about who will take care of their child as soon as possible in the family planning process.

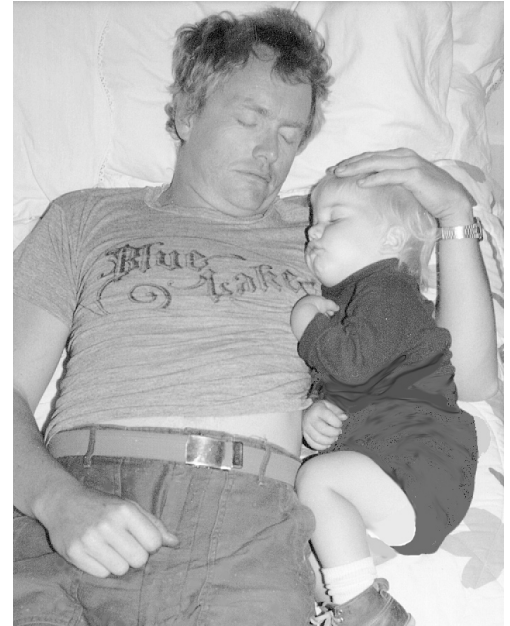
The more thought, planning, time and energy we put into the care of our children in these early days, weeks, months, the better foundation, physically and emotionally, we will be helping them build.

DEVELOPING TRUST IN ONE'S SELF (SEE ALSO NEXT SECTION)

A young child develops trust in herself beginning in the first year of life as she interacts with the environment. She learns to move out into the world, to touch and grasp, through her own effort, those things she has been looking at and longing to reach.

With the loving and understanding

help of adults and older children, and in an environment that meets her changing needs, she will learn that she is capable and strong, that her choices are wise, that she is indeed a fine person.



Special communication with a son every day.
Today a nap on baby's floor bed.
(Jim and Michael Olaf Stephenson)

BABY PLAY/WORK/EXERCISE MAT

The infant wants to move, to exercise all of her muscles, and to be with the family in order to observe, listen to, learn to be part of the group of individuals that will be part of her life forever. This thick woven cotton mat provides a flat surface for exercise, that is far superior than objects that limit movement such as baby carriers, swings, and walkers. And it can be moved from room to room, or house to house, wherever the family is spending time.

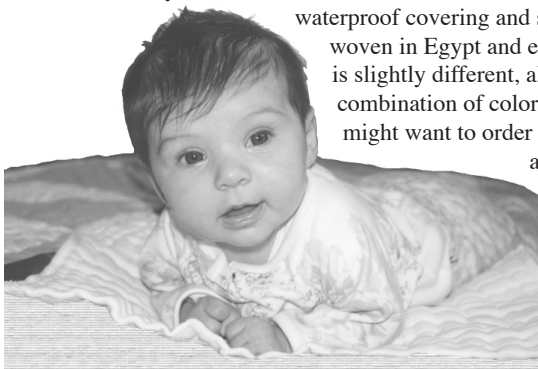
In Montessori lingo *work* is a joyful activity involving the use of the hand or body and mind, and when a child learns to enjoy this kind of exercise early, work under her own power instead of dependence on movement or entertainment with the help of other people, it lays the groundwork for a lifetime of exercise and health.

The *play/work/exercise mat* is soft, thick, handwoven and fringed, made of organic Egyptian cotton. It provides protection against a cool floor. We recommend that you cover it with a crib sheet, and, if the child is naked, a

waterproof covering and sheet. The mat is woven in Egypt and each order we receive is slightly different, always a lovely combination of colors. It is 31" x 39". You might want to order more than one, for use

at home and to keep in the car so the child can continue his work when you are away from home.

BA100 \$34.00



PERFECT FIRST SHOES

The selection of the very best *FIRST* shoes, that will aid the development of movement, is one of the most important considerations for the young child. These *first shoes* are often used as "inside" shoes for Montessori Infant Communities and are perfect for home or outside.

The nonskid bottoms help young crawlers to push against the floor, and the soft bottom helps develop muscles when learning to walk, replicating what it would be like to walk barefoot, which is always the best for the young child.



They are warm and easily removed,

and later put on, by the child. The soft elastic band at the ankle keeps the shoe on. The leather and cotton are soft to the skin and the "sock" part has a lovely knitted pattern. **Red** is the unanimous favorite color, attractive, and easy to find when lost (!) From Sweden. We recommend ordering more than one pair of the closest sizes to the child's age.

BC563	3 months	\$25.00
BC566	6 months	\$25.00
BC5712	12 months	\$25.00
BC5718	18 months	\$25.00
BC5724	24 months	\$25.00

