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opening extract from

The Happy Child:

Everything you Need to Know to Raise Enthusiastic, Confident Children

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Section One

INFANCY

This is the stage when you and your child are just getting to know each other. It's an incredibly important stage, and the developments you'll witness in him will take place much more quickly than others ever will.

At this stage your child must learn to adjust from the more or less perfect environment of the womb to the rather less than perfect environment in which he'll grow up. The enrichment you provide and the way in which you help him negotiate the problems he encounters are central to how well he makes that adjustment.

This is also the time when you lay the foundations that will influence your child for the rest of his life. The two most important cornerstones of these foundations are the knowledge that he's safe and loved, and the belief that he can trust those around him to respond to his needs. Your child's sense of self-confidence and his general outlook on life – whether he's hopeful and optimistic, or fearful and distrustful – will be built upon the foundations that are established during this stage.

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What to Expect During This Phase

How children are programmed to learn

Your baby is born. There has never been, and never will be, another person like her. This is true even if she has an identical twin, because not even identical twins have exactly the same experiences, and we become ourselves through the interplay between our genes and our experiences.

Almost immediately you'll begin to notice certain things about her that are hers and hers alone – how quickly she reacts to noise, the way she moves her mouth or tilts her head in anticipation of her milk, the little sounds of pleasure she makes when she's feeding.

Of course, right now she's entirely reliant on her carers and will be for a very long time, until she's developed the skills she needs to care for herself. You may wonder why human beings start out in such a helpless state. This is so that the 'unfinished' baby can develop to fit the specific circumstances in which she'll be living; so she can acquire the relevant immunities, the appropriate physical abilities, the local language and so on.

She will, however, be very easy to teach. Babies are exquisitely primed to learn the skills they'll need. Almost from birth, for example, they'll prefer to look at a human face rather

than at any other image. They'll pick up the rules of their particular language without being taught them directly. Even more remarkably, they'll use those rules to say things they've never heard – words and phrases that demonstrate how, without even being aware of it, they're learning to understand and use their own particular language.

Notice how intently your baby pays attention to her surroundings. What does she see? How does she understand what's going on? How can it be that in only a few years this dependent newborn will be running around joyfully, understanding what you say to her and answering you back, recognising her loved ones and asking endless questions?

The human brain organises and reorganises itself many times over the course of development. In the early years, the focus of that organisation proceeds in quite an orderly fashion. That's why babies the world over first recognise a familiar face and smile at around the same age, first make cooing noises at around the same time, and so on. If you're aware of that order of development, particularly in the early stages when her brain is developing so quickly, you can provide the richest conditions possible to ensure that she'll develop well.

What's important to your child?

If a baby could write down her first concerns – the things that are most important for her to understand and to come to terms with during the first months of her life – what would she write? Here's the list I think she'd give us:

- **Trust:** I want to know if I can trust the world. Will my needs be fulfilled in a reliable way – that is, will I get the help I need when I ask for it, rather than simply when and if it suits my carers to respond to me?

- **Recognition:** I must learn to distinguish my carers – that is, those people who love me and who want to look after me – from strangers, who might be dangerous.
- **Communication:** I need to have as many means as I can to encourage my carers to stay close to me, and to make sure that they understand my needs and that they respond appropriately to them.
- **Mobility:** I need to learn how to move about by myself, so that I can explore my world and also so that I can get back to my carers quickly if I sense that I'm in danger.

Let's look now at each of these issues in turn and see how your baby will learn to deal with them.

Trust

The first issue, trust, will establish your child's expectations about her world. Trust forms the cornerstones of optimism or pessimism, and of self-confidence or self-doubt.

Whenever a baby is needy – that is, whenever she's hungry, cold, uncomfortable in some other way, or frightened – she must gain the attention of her carers so that they can relieve her distress. At first she can only cry out, but quite quickly she'll learn a number of other ways to attract attention as well, such as smiling and cooing, gesturing, moving towards her carers and ultimately using language.

Once she's expressed her distress, the baby then has to wait for her carer to respond. No one, of course, is able to meet someone else's needs instantly and completely and on every occasion. Nor would such a set-up be in a baby's best interests anyway, because if all her needs were met immediately, she'd have no motivation to become more capable of meeting those needs herself. Mercifully, therefore, the fact that carers can't respond instantly and perfectly to their baby's every

need has a positive side, because, up to a point, it encourages development.

However, if her needs are often not met at all, or if the waiting times before her cries are answered are frequently very long or extremely unpredictable, then the baby won't develop healthily. Those whose needs remain consistently unmet will appear to quieten down after a time – that is, they stop crying out for help. It seems that their brains give up producing adequate amounts of the chemicals that stimulate arousal, so when they're stressed these babies seem not to react. Later in their lives, they'll appear unusually calm or even listless. At the same time they'll be prone to unpredictable outbursts of anger or rage when their suppressed feelings become overwhelming.

On the other hand, those babies whose cries for help are met, but only unpredictably and often only after a long and exhausting wait, may become over-aroused. That is, their brains start producing too much of the arousal chemicals and they become flooded with anxiety almost as soon as they experience the slightest discomfort. It's as if their emotional thermostat is set on a permanent 'high', ready to alert them to danger at the least suggestion that there might be a problem. Later in life, these individuals may seem edgy and nervous. They'll seek frequent reassurance and they're often described as worriers.

This neurochemistry is extremely complicated, involving a number of brain centres and brain chemicals, so I'm not going to go into it any further. If you want to understand the process in more detail I suggest you read either Sue Gerhardt's book *Why Love Matters* or *Raising Babies* by Steve Biddulph (see References and Suggested Reading, page 210).

The evidence we have to date suggests that that during the first two to three years of your baby's life, her reaction to stress will become set, apparently for the rest of her life. It's incredibly important, therefore, that she's in an environment

in which her needs are responded to calmly, lovingly and as quickly as is reasonably possible.

I'll talk in detail in the next chapter about specific ways in which you can help your baby develop a healthy sense of trust.

Recognition

At birth, everything your baby sees and hears will, of course, be new to her. Consequently, you'd think that everything she notices would seem equally interesting. Yet she quite quickly becomes more discerning.

Within the first two or three months your baby will definitely prefer to look at human faces rather than anything else and, in particular, faces that she's seen before. She'll begin to smile especially fondly when she sees those familiar faces, showing pleasure and interest as soon as they come into her view. She'll also start trying to locate any sounds she hears, turning as if to look for the source of those sounds.

During those first few months she'll also gain the ability to vary her focus. At birth, a baby's focus is 'fixed' at about 25cm, or the approximate distance between your face and hers when she's feeding. However, within only a few months she'll become able to vary that focus, so that she can see things both closer and farther away.

At around four months of age your baby will appear to have learned how a human face is supposed to look. If she's shown pictures of human faces that contain small changes – for example, if the mouth is drawn too far down or the eyes aren't level with one another – she'll show great interest in those pictures and gaze at them for long periods. If, on the other hand, the faces she sees are hugely distorted – for example, if the eyes and the nose in the drawing have been swapped around – she's likely to cry out in alarm and distress.

In general, however, your baby will be studying her world happily, showing great interest and delight in her

surroundings. Almost anything will capture her interest, particularly anything that's new and slightly unusual. But above all she'll be drawn towards human faces, and the pleasure and the delight she'll show when she recognises a familiar face are incredibly rewarding to her carers.

However, a little later, at around six or seven months, she'll not only show a definite preference for familiar faces, but she'll also start to become cautious, or even wary, when she sees a strange face. This is a period of enormous mental (or 'cognitive') development. Your baby will also start looking for objects if you hide them while she's watching, whereas previously, as soon as the hidden object disappeared from view, she would have behaved as if it no longer existed.

Cognitively, what's happening is that she's becoming aware that objects – and, more to the point, people – that leave her immediate surroundings still exist, even though she can no longer see them. However, at the same time, she doesn't yet have the ability to understand – or perhaps remember – that the objects generally reappear and that the people come back.

This marks the beginning of the period known as 'separation anxiety'. What this means in practical terms is that now, whenever you move out of her sight, your baby is likely to become distressed and anxious, as if she's not sure you'll ever come back.

This is a tiring stage for the most dedicated of carers. Although it's flattering to be so incredibly important and so central in your baby's life, and although it's touching that she wants you there at all times, it's also exhausting to have to take this into account whenever you move!

Over the next few months your baby will gradually become more relaxed when you go away, particularly if you precede your leave-taking with a familiar routine of some sort. Her own cognitive and physical development will be helping her, too. Her memory will develop and improve, so she'll become able to recall that even if you do leave, you also come back.

Physically she's becoming mobile – crawling, shuffling, or even taking her first few steps – so she's acquiring the skills to get herself to you whenever she starts to feel that you're too far away.

Now, however, there's an additional problem. Because her memory is that much more developed, your baby can recognise even more readily who's familiar and who isn't. As you might expect, her distress in the presence of strangers will therefore increase and she'll show particular distress if she encounters someone totally new, especially if none of her beloved carers is nearby.

This is the beginning of the period that's known as 'stranger anxiety' and, once again, you can understand how your baby's behaviour makes sense in terms of her survival. When a still fairly helpless, but nonetheless curious, toddler moves away from her carers to pursue some exciting new interest, it's important that she's able to recognise straight away that she's no longer close to those people who are dedicated to keeping her safe.

Over the next few weeks and months, as your baby, now a toddler, becomes more and more able to get around by herself, and as she starts to use language effectively, her fear of strangers will gradually ease. By the time she's around two and a half to three years old she'll be so confident that she's likely to regard strangers with renewed interest – that is, of course, if she knows you're nearby or that she can get to you easily!

Communication

We tend to think of communication only in terms of language, of talking and of listening to each other, but there's so much more to communication than simply words! That's why, for example, it's so easy to be misunderstood when you write letters or emails, and why we often interrupt each other inappropriately on the telephone, or feel uncomfortable during a

long pause when we can't see the person who's speaking. This is because, without even being aware of it, we're reading and inferring at least as much about each other from gestures, eye contact and body positions as we are from what's actually being said.

These non-verbal cues establish the framework for verbal communication, setting the context and establishing general moods and attitudes. This means that long before your baby understands speech, you and she will be communicating with one another in a number of ways. Let's look at how you do this.

Eye contact

Eye contact is one of the earliest ways that you and your baby will attract and hold each other's attention. During the first weeks of her life, she'll sleep a great deal – the average amount of sleep a baby requires is about 16 hours in every 24. As I previously said, her 25cm focus length means that in the very early stages, eye contact between you will be limited.

When you're feeding her, though, she'll be perfectly positioned to see your face clearly. Notice during those times how closely she studies you. Your face, in all its various expressions, will create the basis or the 'template' for what your baby will come to think a face should look like. This means that it's largely up to you whether your baby's first impression of the world is that it's a place that seems full of anxiety and sadness, or smiles and joy.

Crying

A baby's cries are considered by most of us to be extremely intrusive and almost impossible to ignore – and that's not surprising. Crying is the only way that a newborn can attract attention from someone with whom she's not in direct

contact, so the human brain is designed to make it difficult for us to screen out the sound of a baby's cries and to make us want to help her when we hear her cry.

Smiling

Babies smile from birth and apparently not just in response to what they see. They smile in their sleep or when they hear gentle new sounds. It's also been shown that even blind babies smile during those first days and weeks. It's not thought, though, that these early smiles necessarily convey pleasure, are a response to something she's seen or are intended as a social signal. During their first days and weeks, a newborn's smile is more like a reflex.

However, sometime during the second or third month of her life you'll find that she begins to smile when she's stimulated, particularly if that stimulation is visual and most particularly if it's a face-like visual pattern. By the time she's about four months old, as I've already said, she'll almost certainly smile at the sight of a human face.

From that time on, her responses will become increasingly sophisticated. Soon she'll start smiling most at the faces that are familiar to her and, as you've already learned, by about five or six months of age she'll not only smile very definitely when she sees a familiar face, but she'll also start to react in a more guarded way to strange faces.

This development ties in with the cognitive advances we talked about in the last section, those developments in her brain, and especially her memory, that allow her to distinguish her carers from everyone else. The special smile she reserves for her carers, along with kicking, waving her arms and gurgling in delight, are all designed to make her carers feel incredibly important and loved – which of course they are!

Turn-taking

If you were to take apart an ordinary conversation between two people you'd soon notice that it's made up not only of sounds – that is, the actual words spoken – but also of pauses, the moments when there are no sounds. Those pauses are a signal to the listener that it's now his turn to speak if he wishes to do so.

This seems totally obvious to an adult, but you have to remember that as far as your baby is concerned, everything to do with communication is new, and it must first be understood and then mastered. She's already learned the first fundamental step – that when she wants to communicate with you she must first gain your attention, either through eye contact, crying or smiling. Now she'll need to learn the art of turn-taking.

This will happen effortlessly, particularly once your baby's three or four months old. When you're bathing her, feeding her or simply holding her and enjoying her company, you'll notice that she becomes more alert whenever you start to speak. If she's crying at the time she's likely to stop, particularly if you speak soothingly. She'll watch you closely when you're speaking and then she'll look away when you stop.

Likewise, and without even realising it, you'll turn your attention on and off to her in a similar way. When she gurgles or coos you're quite likely to look at her and when your 'turn' comes, because she's quiet again, you may well imitate some of the sounds she's just made.

These enjoyable, frequent exchanges are establishing the framework in which conversations will take place later. It sounds so simple and so natural – but that's because it is! All you need to do is to make it a priority to spend time together. In addition, some specific activities, for example, games such as peek-a-boo (and I'll explain more about peek-a-boo in chapter two), will also help her learn about the art of taking turns.

Gesture

As your baby becomes more mobile and more aware that she can control her own movements, she'll also start to use non-verbal signals to indicate her needs to you. At first, whenever she wants something or she becomes excited, she'll simply move about generally; she'll kick or wave her arms about, and perhaps blow bubbles and coo.

Gradually, however, those movements will become more refined and purposeful. By the time she's approaching her first birthday, she'll have learned to wave bye-bye and to point at things she wants or that she's noticed and would like to share with you.

More than anything else, these skills are proof of your baby's increasing physical skills. They also indicate that she's starting to understand how she can use her new skills to 'tell' her carers what she wants.

Spoken language

Language development is a bit like putting together a set of Russian dolls in that each stage of your baby's language development contains within it all the preceding stages. We've already talked about the first stages – attracting and holding another person's attention, and learning to take turns. The next step is to find ways to convey meaning in the sounds that she makes. This skill began to emerge almost at birth, when she started to cry in different ways to express different needs, although at that stage she didn't consciously differentiate the types of sounds she made.

At first, all babies in all parts of the world will make the same sounds. Your baby's early babbling noises will sound just like those of a baby who'll later speak Spanish or Finnish or any other language. This is yet another example of how adaptive babies are! Any baby, no matter where she's born,

is capable of learning the language of her own particular community.

Somewhere between the ages of about eight and 12 months, you'll observe two changes in the sounds your baby is making. First, she'll begin to babble less. Second, the noises that she does make will start to sound more and more like the language she's been hearing around her. At that point, when her babbling has almost totally stopped, you're likely to hear that first 'real' word.

It's interesting to note that whatever language she hears, her first word is most likely to begin with a closed, forceful sound made with the lips, followed by an open-mouthed vowel sound – something like 'ma', 'pa' or 'da'. Linguists believe that this is because it's easiest for human beings to pair up sounds that are as different from each other as possible. This probably also explains why the words for 'mother' and 'father' in so many languages are made up of this maximally contrasting pair of sounds – 'mummy', 'papa' and so on.

Once that first word emerges, many more will follow in rapid succession. By the time she's about 18 to 24 months old your baby's likely to be using dozens of words, although she's probably only using them one at a time. She'll use each single word, however, to mean quite a lot more than adults use it to mean. For example, 'mama' may mean 'I see my mummy' or 'I want you to pick me up, mummy', or it could mean 'Mummy, I'm frightened!', to give but a few possibilities.

The most important point, though – the huge leap in understanding that your baby's now made – is that she's begun to use sounds (words) to let you know what she needs or to convey to you that there's something she wants to share with you. This is a truly amazing step forward and it means your baby has now acquired the most powerful social tool she'll ever have.

Her use of language will now grow faster than ever, particularly the more time you spend talking to her and listening

to her. Soon she'll be putting two words together – 'Daddy go', 'Me bikky' and 'Allgone milk', for example. She'll now start modifying what she's trying to tell you, to make it more precise.

To me, the most exciting aspect of language development occurs when you start to hear your baby making mistakes. These mistakes demonstrate that she's begun to understand the rules that govern her language. She won't, of course, be aware that she's using any 'rules' to create what she says. Nevertheless, she'll show you that she does understand, both by her mistakes and by saying things she's never heard anyone say before. She might say, for example, 'I runned fast' or 'I eated it all.'

The ability to say something that she's never heard before, something, however, that respects the rules of her language, is a truly remarkable feature of the human brain. Even more amazing, it happens without any formal instruction, and before your baby can consciously understand that she's actually making use of linguistic rules and structures.

And speaking of understanding, keep in mind that your toddler, as she is now, will almost always understand a great deal more than she can actually say. It's generally accepted that in language development, comprehension, or the understanding of language, races far ahead of production, or the ability to speak it.

There are a number of enjoyable ways you can help your baby to develop her communication skills, and I'll be telling you more about them in the next chapter.

Mobility

The human body is designed for movement. We're healthier when we're as mobile as we can be. Therefore, you won't need to encourage your baby to move about – she'll naturally want to express herself through movement. All you need to do is to provide her with plenty of opportunities to move about safely.

The upper body

Of course, initially your newborn will be quite limited in what she can do. Her head will be disproportionately heavy, so it will be too difficult for her to lift it by herself, and she'll have no conscious control over her muscles, so she won't be able to 'decide' to move. She'll also still have a tendency to curl up into the position she was in when she was in the womb. However, during the first three or four months your baby's neck muscles will gradually develop and strengthen, and she'll also grow so that her head is no longer so disproportionately heavy. She'll also begin to straighten out when you lay her down.

At about this time she will 'discover' her own hands. You'll notice that she'll play with them for long periods, pulling on and sucking at her fingers, and taking them in and out of her mouth, and in and out of view. This not only indicates that she's becoming more able physically. It also means that she's beginning to link her various senses – in particular, what she sees with what she can do.

This integration of the senses will become increasingly complex and impressive as your baby grows. It's an incredibly important aspect of development, because the integration of the senses is, of course, a key factor for our survival. We depend mainly on sight and hearing to alert us to danger, and on our ability to move or fight to deal with that danger.

Once your baby begins to coordinate seeing with doing, she'll also start performing more complicated manoeuvres. For example, at around three to four months she'll learn how to roll over. This is a mixed blessing, because this new skill means she'll need to be watched much more carefully now!

It will take several more months of exploring herself and her immediate surroundings before she becomes able to reach out for and grasp something that takes her fancy. It becomes easier for her to manage this once her ability to focus becomes

more fine-tuned, as her better focus will allow her to gauge her movements more accurately. However, it will be still a few months more before she can choose what to do after she reaches out. Initially, she'll simply reach out and grasp – and for some time thereafter, that's all she'll seem able to do. This is quite limiting for her, but less tiring for you than the next stage will be!

During that next stage, which begins sometime around seven to ten months, she'll become able to 'choose' to let go after grasping. That means you'll be picking up her toys, and picking up her toys, and picking up her toys . . . At this point, not only will she become able to let go after grasping, but she'll also become able to choose what to do after reaching out. Now she might stroke a desired object or simply touch it. It will also be easy now to teach her to wave 'bye-bye'.

The lower body

Physical development starts primarily in the upper body, but of course it's not limited to that area. During her first months, your baby won't only be learning to use her hands and arms, and to coordinate sight with movement and sound with movement. She'll also be learning to use the lower part of her body – to sit up, perhaps to crawl or shuffle, then to stand, and, of course, ultimately to walk and run.

At around three or four months she'll take great delight in trying to pull herself up if you take hold of her hands, although she'll still need you to support her completely, of course. She'll also start trying to sit up, and again she'll need to be fully supported at first, but gradually she'll become able to hold herself in a sitting position. By the time they're around seven to ten months old, most babies will be able to sit up unsupported.

Being upright has enormous advantages, not least because it allows her to have a more 'normal' view of the world, which,

in turn, will speed up the development of her hand–eye co-ordination. This interplay – the developments in one system or area of the body helping to bring on developments in others – will now start to take place more and more often.

For some babies the next stage of lower-body development is that they'll learn to crawl. This is more likely for babies who've enjoyed lying on their stomachs, although even then not all of them will crawl. Some babies will 'bottom shuffle' rather than crawl and some may do both. Still others will proceed straight to standing up not long after they sit up, without ever crawling at all.

There's no need to worry about whether your baby crawls, shuffles or does neither, because these activities bear no apparent relationship to a baby's speed of cognitive development, to her ultimate IQ or to the age when she actually starts to walk. Remember that each baby is unique, and yours will progress best and most happily if she's allowed to do so in her own time. Always keep in mind that development isn't a competition, but a miraculous journey, from dependence to independence, that you're privileged to witness.

Chapter one: Overview

By now I expect you're beginning to see how beautifully the four aspects of development – trust, recognition, communication and mobility – interweave and reinforce each other as your baby grows and matures.

- Initially her neurological development will be stimulated and promoted by your consistent, capable and loving responses to her needs. This, in turn, will encourage the cognitive development that will allow her to learn to recognise the people who care for her.
- After an initial period of distress when her loved ones go away, she'll start feeling more settled as she becomes

able to remember that they do come back to her. At the same time she'll be acquiring more and more ways to attract the attention of those loved ones when she needs them or wants them – by crying, smiling and gesturing. Ultimately she'll master language, the most powerful social tool of all.

- Throughout this period of rapid cognitive development, she'll be developing physically as well, of course. This means she'll become able to explore more and more of the world about her, and to get back to her carers by herself when she decides to do so.
- The result of this amazing orchestration is a development that's so rapid, so beautifully interwoven, and so finely tuned that you'll be astonished. What's more, you'll continue to feel amazed, no matter how many times you're privileged to watch a tiny, helpless baby develop into an active, independent and innovative toddler.