

Dear Baby TALK Parents,

Can you believe that a HALF YEAR has passed since your little one was born? And what changes you have seen in him! He is mostly content, happy, curious about the world and loves to be held—the real "picture book" baby that you probably hoped for through out your pregnancy. The most appealing thing about six-month-olds is that they are so in love with their parents. The attachment between you is well on its way. Your baby sees you as unique from all other people and has decided that he likes you best. He is probably wary of strangers and maybe even grandparents. Warn them that they might need to approach your baby slowly if they haven't seen him for a while.

As your baby begins her explorations of the world, she is most interested in exploring YOU. As you hold her, she is apt to put her fingers in your mouth and ears and pull your hair, a part of her loving you and wanting to be part of your life, combined with her natural curiosity at this age.

You have already learned that the changes your baby will experience can make life something of a roller-coaster ride for you. Parents are often caught off-guard by the challenges they face with every new stage of their child's development. It really helps to have a "road map" to help prepare you for these challenges and to enable you to enjoy your child's every stage. The best guide we know of is a book written by Dr. T. Berry Brazelton entitled Touchpoints, Addison-Wesley, 1992.

Touchpoints is a parent's guide to the early years of a child's life. Every aspect of life is explored (feeding, sleeping, play and physical development, to name a few) and placed into the context of how a child's development affects the family at every stage. Through more than forty

years of practice and research, Dr. Brazelton has identified predictable stages at which children fall apart as they prepare to take a spurt in development. These disorganization times are hard on families who are not prepared for them. Having this book as a guide through the early years will help to manage the challenges of this time of life.

LET'S TALK

In the next couple of months your baby will babble in "words" with a consonant and a vowel ("da", "ba," "ma"). She will also make noises with the saliva in her mouth and try to imitate sounds you make. She will delight in conversations you share with the sounds she makes, and your response to her will encourage her to experiment more with her voice.

Your baby understands simple words you speak to her, especially if she hears them over and over.



That's why it's a good idea to "talk through tasks" with her: describing with words the events in her life. (*"Let's put your hand through your sleeve. There. Isn't that a warm sleeper?"*) Some parents report that they feel a little silly with these one-sided conversations, but the truth is that babies are

listening and learning meanings to words for many months before they can respond in conversation.

BABY'S BODY

You can probably tell by the activity you see in your baby that he is gearing up to become mobile. He is starting to get around a little, whether by rolling, scooting or crawling. He can probably roll over. You may have seen him rocking on his hands and knees for a short time. Very soon, he will be able to sit alone. (Remember, though: His sitting will be "wobbly." Don't leave him sitting alone.)



Your baby has become more adept at handling objects. He will soon be able to pass objects from one hand to another, which is an important task. At six months of age, some babies have already begun to show a hand preference, favoring one hand over the other.

MEAL TIME

Sitting in a high chair is a new experience for most six-months-olds. You have probably started gradually introducing some solid foods. You will soon find that your baby's favorite foods will be ones that he can **feed himself**. Peas, cheerios—these will be your child's favorites once he has mastered the **pincer grasp**. By using his thumb and opposing finger, your child will discover independent feeding, and he will revel in it. He will also enjoy exploring a spoon and a cup, but the food itself is probably of less interest than the tools used for feeding. Frustrated parents have to accept that exploration is more important than food at this age, and trust that their baby really will get enough.

SO-O-O SMART

The most interesting aspect of the six-month-old's development is amazing mental growth. Two important concepts, **object permanence** and **cause-and-effect**, begin to emerge. Did you ever wonder why babies get such a kick out of playing peek-a-boo? It is because they don't realize that an object still exists when they cannot see it. When you hide your face, a very young baby doesn't know you are still there. But an older baby who understands **object permanence** ("An object still exists even though I can't see it") will laugh hilariously during peek-a-boo, celebrating the fact that he is "in on the joke." To find out whether or not your baby has learned object permanence, let him watch you put a toy under a blanket. If he lifts the blanket to uncover the toy, you can bet he is learning object permanence. Babies love to play games of this sort.

Learning **cause and effect** is a big step on the road to feeling a sense of control over the environment. Your baby is in the process of discovering that she can do something on purpose to make something else happen. This understanding that she can exercise some control on her surroundings will lead to the development of self-esteem. Your baby is empowering herself to become a capable person!

You can observe this growth of her notion of cause and effect in many ways. When sitting in a high chair, she may drop a spoon over the side and then look to see where it has gone. She listens for the sound it makes as it hits the floor. She watches to see if an adult will come and pick it up. She is delighted by all the things she was able to cause to happen by her action dropping the spoon.

Babies love the sound they can make banging objects together. Again, that gratifying sound is the result of their actions, something they can cause to happen.

At this age, your baby may begin to use crying as a way to make something happen. She has learned that crying is a way to bring a loving adult to her. Since she must still depend on you for most things, she may use this crying to bring you to her, even when she is not in any real distress. You will by now have learned your baby's different cries, and can probably tell when she is crying because she is bored and wants you to change her environment or entertain her!



A BOARD BOOK: THE PERFECT TOY

A six-month-old loves to manipulate objects with his hands. He loves to hear and learn new words. He can remember that something exists even when he can't see it. And he has learned that he can make things happen. For all of these reasons, a board book is the perfect toy for the six-month-old child.

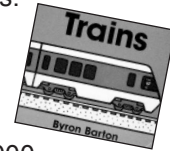
The stiff pages of a board book are easy for little hands to turn. Your baby will love to have you talk to him about the pictures on the pages. Even when the book is closed, he can remember the images on the pages inside. He can predict that if he opens the book, he will see the image he is expecting. What a wonderful feeling of success when he can make that happen! Board books are created to enable babies to give themselves a successful first experience with books. We know many babies who've become so attached to a particular board book that they have insisted on taking them to bed with them (hard corners and all) and dragging them everywhere.

The parent's role with board books is to introduce the book, talking about the pages and then serving as a "consultant" to talk again about a page or read the text when the baby or toddler shoves the book at you for your response. He may actually sit and listen while you read the whole book, or he may be interested only in one page. It doesn't really matter at this point. Soon enough he will

want to hear the whole book! Most of the "reading" will be done by your baby alone as he plays with the book, opens the pages, gazes at the illustrations, chews on the corners and carries the book along.

Here are a few great board books:

- Trains
- Byron Barton, Harper 1998
- Pajama Time
- Sandra Boynton, Workman 2000
- Black on White Also, White on Black
- Tana Hoban, Greenwillow 1993
- I Love Hugs
- Lara Jones, Scholastic 2001
- Splash!
- Flora McDonnell, Candlewick 1999
- Pretty Brown Face
- Andrea & Brian Pinkney, Harcourt 1997
- Peek a Boo Baby
- Nicola Smee, Barrons 2002
- Max's Ride
- Rosemary Wells, Dial 1998



All of these authors have produced a number of outstanding board books. Look for other titles, as well.

BEST WISHES FROM YOUR FRIENDS AT BABY TALK

 **Baby TALK**

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