

Book Review-BABIES IN MIND, Jenny Perkel-Understanding your baby's psychological needs: Review by Jeanine Beukes

2007, Juta Books, Cape Town

Softback. 208 pages

ISBN9780702177019

This book offers a compelling easy to read perspective on mother and baby interaction and sensitive maternal care. It is a must read for all expecting parents.

The author, Jenny Perkel, aims to give the new mother a user-friendly window into her infant's mind. The book offers a new look on the mother- infant dyad and the basic issues they will encounter in baby's first year.

The author encourages mothers to set aside advice based on common myths and instead offers well researched information on the developing infant's capacities and needs. She draws on her own experience as a mother and clinical psychologist to write in a conversational and supportive way without losing her authority and credibility.

The most compelling aspect of this book is its tone - Jenny Perkel broaches oft forbidden topics like hating your baby, unconscious rage and the possible long term emotional damage of leaving your baby for long periods. Yet throughout her tone is supportive and conversational – even as she informs, she “holds” the young mother and comforts her less she feel judged or incompetent.

Herein lies the secret of this riveting piece of reading. Mothers are encouraged to make their baby their top priority (not a favourite standpoint for the womens liberation movement) , they are also reminded how invaluable they are, and how fundamentally irreplaceable their role as mother to their infant.

The author has divided the book into three sections :

- Psychological preparation for birth
- The everyday life of a new parent
- Troubling aspects of being a new parent

Information is presented in a clear, easy to read manner. Throughout the book there are many illustrative case studies to further broaden the readers' practical understanding of the theory presented. Key issues are summarized and highlighted in grey user-friendly windows. The format is similar to that of a magazine article with paragraphs in bold to catch the reader's attention. Useful contact numbers of supportive agencies and specialists are provided but the list is cursory and non comprehensive.

The author starts from the premise that experiences during the very early months of life shape the individual organically and psychologically. She has drawn on Ericson's developmental research and consistently draws

the mothers' attention to the developmental task which must be mastered in baby's first year, that of learning to trust.

All advice or practical guidance which does not facilitate this primary task is challenged and alternative, more humane and sensitive manners of relating to baby are suggested. Subjects covered include :

- Dispelling the pregnancy fairytale and letting go of idealized pictures of motherhood.
- Handling parenting advice – (Discard most, if not all)
- Different ideologies in parenting – Herein the author promotes the mothers' developing awareness and encourages her to trust in herself and her ability to respond to her baby's needs sensitively.
- Feeding – preferably breast and on demand. Following the baby's needs at this early stage will form an integral part of the mother-baby relationship.
- Sleep – babies need a parent to be available during the night if necessary. They need their parents to be in tune with their own unique but ever changing sleep requirements.
- Separation Anxiety – Baby's psychological experience of sleep and his need to feel safe and to trust before he can enter a sleep world away from mother.
- Crying – Offering emotional containment and prompt soothing to prevent ongoing distress . Fostering a sense of trust and safety for the baby as opposed to "promoting" self sufficiency and independence at this early stage.
- Father's role – that of containing and holding the mother-infant dyad rather than being the "hands on" dad.
- Mother-infant attachment \ bonding. This first relationship forms baby's template for all future relationships. The more secure and healthy this bond the better equipped baby will be for life.
- Separation from baby – duration apart needs to be limited when baby is very little, with much care taken to arrange a consistent, loving mother- substitute when mother is absent.
- Understanding negative feelings – on love and hate in mother's mind and the dangers of denying parents' real feelings.
- Maternal stress and post-natal depression.

The author neglects to examine the role of siblings and their impact on the mother-new baby dyad, but this is probably because she assumes her readers are first-time mothers.

While broaching complex issues such as the neurological consequences of baby's exposure to stress and the effect of unconscious ambivalent maternal feelings, it is a compelling read for people from diverse intellectual and socio-economic backgrounds.

Babies In Mind fills a neglected niche area in the baby- care literature and offers a simple yet sophisticated and well researched message to new mothers. It is highly recommended for all mothers seeking a loving and meaningful relationship with their babies. It is affirming and encouraging yet dares to confront the ill-informed cruelties of common baby-care practice today

Jeanine Beukes

Clinical Psychologist

3 Berram Rd, Rondebosch

e-mail: jeaninebeukes@telkomsa.net

AUTHOR: Jeanine Beukes; Additional information: Hilary Pereira

TITLE: [Those who co-parent with us \(nannies\)](#)

DATE: 26/05/05

ISSUE: August 05

APPROVAL NEEDED: No

STRAPLINE: Special Feature

WORD COUNT: 2862

Those who co-parent with us

Working mothers need a support system they can rely on, and most turn to nannies for help. Here's all you need to know about one of the most important relationships you'll ever have.

You're due back at work after an awesome 12 to 16 weeks at home with your precious baby. Somehow you've both survived, *YOUR LITTLE ONE HAS GROWN.YOU KNOW HER,SHE KNOWS YOU AND YOU'VE MANAGED TO GET IN-SYNC SOME OF THE TIME *. She has definitely smiled at you, she turns at the sound of your voice and her eyes follow you. You've become a couple, a maternal dyad. You're intensely proud of what you've achieved, and now the prospect of returning to work looms.

You've carefully weighed up the options and, for whatever reasons — financial need; obligation to your employers and your commitment to them; personal need for stimulation; pressure or encouragement from your partner to return — you've decided to go back to work. It's a decision not embarked on lightly; you certainly don't want to abandon or to traumatise your infant, and you would still like to be a good mother and maintain a nurturing environment for your baby. Our culture has deemed you the hands-on nurturer. Even if you choose to delegate some of the responsibility for raising your child, the ultimate responsibility for her wellbeing remains with you, the mother. You are going to need to be a continuous presence in your child's life for her to develop optimally - both physically and emotionally. That being said, and without abdicating your role as mother, you still want to return to work.

Nannies as gifted resources

In South Africa we have a relatively unique situation in that many unskilled or academically uneducated women are particularly well-suited to nurture our children. Certain women, although they may lack formal education, have the basic personality traits and skills for hands-on care-taking, making them perfectly equipped to take on one of the most important tasks society needs. Globally, there is a trend that nannies from all cultures and classes are becoming a respected and deeply valued resource in the homes of working mothers. In fact, increasingly being a nanny is regarded as a calling, as a valued vocation. We've entered a new era in our country where this pool of surrogate daily mothers is becoming increasingly valued. As parents we want to have daily contact with our children, but need assistance if we want to be employed in the formal sector.

You might have the appropriate space at home to have a 'live-in' nanny, or you may prefer to employ the right person to work on a daily basis in your home. She would then return to her home and her world of responsibilities in the evening and come back the next day (hopefully refreshed and supported), to assist you. The advantages of having one caretaker at home as opposed to taking your baby to crèche are numerous. Even the day-mother who has a group of charges in her expert care is not as desirable as the right nanny. Psychological research has shown that having a single caregiver facilitates healthy attachment in baby

Daily considerations

Let's start with the morning routine. Your little one may have had a bad night and she's sleeping peacefully when you wake to dress for work. Instead of disturbing her to prepare her for her day, you leave her peacefully sleeping so she can develop her own sleeping pattern. You have a few minutes to chat to nanny so that she knows what to expect from your baby when she wakes up. You can then leave for work without all the baby paraphernalia and possibly even get there on time! No screams or protests as you leave since your baby is in a familiar environment, with a person both you and she have come to trust. Should you be fortunate enough to have a flexible time schedule at work, you might then be able to return home to breastfeed her, or if you've switched to formula, you could simply come home to cuddle her and see that she's okay.

If your work day ends earlier than usual, you may even enjoy the luxury of a quick nap in the comfort of your home while your baby, her rhythm undisturbed, is tended to and soothed by a devoted nanny. You can then awake, refreshed and ready, for the evening shift with your precious child.

Dad also now has the chance to pop back to see his little one if his work situation allows this. He too can 'visit' at random and without upsetting baby, since a competent and caring nanny has been co-opted to provide the constant presence your baby needs while you and your partner work. When you come home from work you could find that nanny had a good day with your baby, and possibly even had time to cook a meal for you. An added bonus (or minor miracle) would be a relatively clean and ordered home! These are certainly not her top priorities, but once your little one is settled, soothed and happy, your nanny will in all probability be able to assume certain household chores.

Financial viability

Obviously this arrangement needs to be financially viable, for both the working mom and her nanny, who should be able to take pride in her work and feel valued for what she does. On average, mothers report that one-to-one childcare with a nanny at home works out to be slightly more expensive than day-care or crèche facilities. However, the uninterrupted one-on-one care instead of constantly changing and rotating crèche minders and your baby's lowered risk of sickness, should be factored in. The help nanny is able to give with domestic chores provides additional value for money.

Babies at crèche or in small group care are exposed to more infections at a time when their immunity is low. Often mothers unwittingly leave an ailing child at a crèche, or alternatively, due to work pressure, drop off a sick baby who then puts others at risk. If we consider the cost of potential loss of earnings (and credibility) that results from having to stay home to tend to a sick baby, the additional expense of hiring a nanny may, in the long run may not be so great.

Who to choose?

Should you decide to opt for a nanny, it is essential that you choose a person suited to you, your family and, most importantly, your special baby. You need to decide what specific attributes to look for in selecting a nanny. Reliability (punctuality if you need to get to work on time!), good health, patience, a placid nature and calm competence in handling babies are generally desirable. Your nanny will need to stay good-humoured, even in the face of the frequently repetitive nature of the tasks required by baby and toddler care. Most importantly, look for a nanny who genuinely displays love for little ones and is prepared for a long-term commitment.

Carolyn * enjoyed a special connection with her daughter's 'tata'. She shares: "How would I know how to select a woman like Mary Ngendo again? I am not sure the answers are clear. I do know that for six years I

was privileged to share my life and my child with a woman whose calm conviction, serene grace, unshakeable faith and infinite wisdom touched all who knew her. To my youngest child she bequeathed a legacy no words can measure, and she showed me, as a mother, the incalculable value of mothering with grace.”

To be a good nanny is a calling and if all goes well, your baby will become very attached to her. This is both healthy and desirable, and with the support of the right nanny, you will be able to continue to provide the security and safety you gave to your baby in her first weeks.

When to choose?

Working mothers and their babies both need time to get to know their nannies before mom returns to work. Time taken to develop mutual understanding and to build these relationships will be a great investment. Ideally, the nanny could be introduced to the family shortly before baby’s birth; she would then be able to assist with household chores and understand the running of the home before baby’s arrival. The advantage of an early start would be that the mother then already has a built-in support system when the father returns to work soon after the birth. There is also a chance for the nanny (or both caretakers) to attend a first aid or parenting course. Mother and nanny then have a chance to observe each other in action, with nanny initially being a supportive presence in the background. However, as the drama of baby caring escalates, she will soon be drawn in. While you take time to get to know each other, you will soon* know if you have chosen the right person. If not, you will still have time to make a change. As you begin to feel confident in nanny’s ability, you will be able to leave home for short periods and nanny and you will become more interchangeable in baby’s eyes. Trust, that absolute basic requirement for you as the parent, should grow as you get to know your nanny and become attached to her.

Whose baby is it anyway?

Your baby will always be *your* baby. You should guide and clarify what you expect from your nanny. As your baby begins to dictate what happens when, her interests will become your shared concern, and increasingly, decisions will be made with input from both sides.

In no way does baby’s attachment to nanny (and sometimes preference for her!) threaten your unique mothering relationship. It’s not abnormal to feel jealous. Soon you’ll realise that if you can be gracious about sharing, ** you can take delight in becoming a happy working mother. And in time you’ll be able to relax knowing baby is in a safe caring environment with a trustworthy co-parent. Co-mothering has its own particular challenges and demands. It can be both a necessary compromise and a rich blessing as relationships grow and loving bonds are formed over time.

**

About the author:

Jeanine Beukes is a clinical psychologist with 20 years experience in private practice. She has studied both locally and abroad. She has a psychoanalytic practice working with many patients over a period of years ** thus allowing her to monitor how people and families develop over time.

Draft proposal for the Infant Rights Declaration 1

Introduction 2

The creation of WAIMH was, in itself, a declaration of the infant's rights for 3

mental health, as reflected in its 5 purposes described in the bylaws: 4

"The ASSOCIATION has been organized to operate exclusively for 5

scientific, charitable and educational purposes as follows: 6

To operate exclusively for charitable, scientific and educational purposes, 7

and more specifically to research and study throughout the world, the 8

mental development and mental disorder in children from conception 9

through three years of age; 10

To facilitate international cooperation among individuals concerned with 11

promoting conditions that will bring about the optimal development of 12

infants and infant-caregiver relationships; 13

To encourage the realization that infancy is a sensitive period in the 14

psychosocial development of individuals; 15

To promote education, research, and study of the effects of mental 16

development during infancy on later normal and psychopathological 17

development; and to promote research and study of the mental health of 18

the parents, families and other caregivers of infants; 19

To promote the development of scientifically based programs of care, 20

intervention, and prevention of mental impairment in infancy." 21

22

The infant (from birth to age of 3 years) by reason of his physical and 23
mental immaturity and absolute dependence needs special safeguards and 24
care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth. 25

26

As professionals who work with infants and parents within different cultures 27
and societies, we feel there is a need for specifying its rights, beyond what 28
has been already included in the Declaration of Children's Rights". As 29
detailed in the Declaration of Children's Rights, the first three principles 30
deal with non-discrimination, protection by law and the right to an identity. 31
Principle 4 states an entitlement to growth and development in health, with 32
adequate pre-natal care, nutrition and medical services. Principle 5 states 33
provisions for children with special needs. Principle 6 asserts the child's 34
needs for love and understanding from parents and caregivers as well as 35
the obligations of society to provide support "in an atmosphere of affection 36
and moral and material security". Principle 7 asserts the right to education, 37
play and recreation. Principles 8 and 9 deal with priorities for the child for 38
obtaining protection in the midst of adversity, neglect, cruelty and 39
exploitation. Principle 10 asserts the right of the child to be brought in an 40
atmosphere of tolerance as opposed to exposure to racial or religious 41
discrimination. 42

Draft 15th July, 2013

World Association for Infant Mental Health

43

44

This Declaration of the Rights of the Infant is drafted in order to bring to 45
public awareness world-wide the foundational importance of the first three 46
years of life as a period of unique sensitivity to environmental influences 47
that may have enduring effects on later development. The young child's 48
capacity to experience, regulate, and express emotions, form close and 49
secure relationships, and explore the environment and learn are 50
fundamental to mental as well as physical health throughout the life span. 51

52

53

Basic Principles of Infant Rights 54

55

To become a full member of his/her family, and be registered as a citizen 56
straight after birth. 57

To be given the same value to life, regardless of gender or any individual 58
character. 59

To be given nurturing caregiving, including safety, adequate nutrition, and 60
a loving relationship. 61

To have his/her most important attachment relationships and their 62
continuity valued and protected. 63

64

65

Public social and health policy areas that should be informed by these 66
principles: 67

The provision of preventive physical and mental health hygiene, starting 68
from pregnancy, through medically well-informed prenatal care, emotional 69

support for parents, and early detection of physical and emotional threats 70
to well-being. The provision of access to evaluation and treatment by 71
trained professionals who are culturally sensitive and knowledgeable about 72
early development and emotional health. 73
The provision of adequate time for parents to get to know their infants and 74
become skilled in providing for their infant's care and comfort, through 75
adequate social policies such as parental leave. 76
As needed, the provision of access to early educational programs that 77
promote cognitive and socio-emotional development 78
As needed, the provision of access to effective mental health treatment 79
that alleviates infant's suffering. 80

Draft 15th July, 2013

World Association for Infant Mental Health

81

82

References 83

The Declaration of the Rights of the Child, adopted by the General 84
Assembly of the United Nations, 1959; taken verbatim from the internet 85
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva – 6pp. 86
Early Child Development: A Powerful Equalizer. Final Report for the 87
WHO's commission on the Social Determinants of Health, composed by 88
Lori G. Irwin, Arjumand Siddiqi, & Dr Clyde Hertzman, June 2007. 89
Early Childhood Matters, Bernard van Leer Foundation, 2009 90
The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. 91
www2.ohchr.org/English/bodies/crc/index.htm 92

Council of Europe: Commissioner for Human Rights 93

www.coe.int/t/commissioner 94

NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child 95

www.childrightsnet.org 96

Young children's rights and public policy: Practices and possibilities for 97

citizenship in the early years. Glenda MacNaughton, Patrick Hugues, Kylie 98

Smith, *Children & Society*, vol. 21(6), 2007 99

100