

How to Make a Smart Baby

By: Madeleine Fitzpatrick, June 17, 2008

If intelligence is the ability to learn, then babies are born geniuses! While babies' brains have the potential to learn just about anything, parents have an important part to play in determining just how much - and how easily - their baby learns. Here, we discuss the key issues to bear in mind when teaching your baby.

A unique window of opportunity: five months' gestation to five years of age

The younger the brain, the more malleable it is - that's why small children are like sponges. The brain builds itself by forming connections in response to the stimulation it receives. A baby begins responding to sound during month five in the womb, when her sense of hearing becomes fully developed. This means that learning begins before birth.

After birth, the brain continues wiring itself in response to the baby's experiences of the world. Learning is faster and more effortless than it will ever be again. Acquiring our native language from birth guarantees proficiency, regardless of how linguistically gifted we turn out to be as adults - and the same holds true for other subjects. Everyone can become proficient in reading, math or music, so long as they begin learning as babies.

- **Babies love to learn!**

Babies' brains are hardwired for learning, making babies the most avid students in the world. What's more, babies and small children carry none of the baggage that comes from being sent to school and being subjected to quizzes, tests and examinations. For babies, learning is pure enjoyment.

- **Teaching should never be forced**

Regular practice is important, but not to the point of forcing. Above all, your child should enjoy the learning process. Hold lessons only when he is receptive, and end them before he loses interest.

- **Play is essential**

Babies and children need time to explore the world around them, pick up objects and examine them, and get to grips with the laws of nature. Your baby should spend the majority of her waking hours engaged in hands-on play.

- **Relax and have fun!**

Avoid focusing on having your child achieve specific knowledge goals. Treat lesson time instead as an opportunity for strengthening the parent-child bond. Teaching your baby should never become a source of stress for either one of you. If you feel this is happening, reevaluate your approach or trim down the lesson program as necessary.