

It's Never Too Early to Start Parenting: Prenatal Parenting

"Ignoring your unborn child is like leaving him alone in his room for nine months."
 Frederick Wirth, M.D. in *Prenatal Parenting*

It is never too early to start parenting. According to perinatal expert Thomas Verny M.D., "The new brain science proves that human emotion and the sense of self originate



not in the first year after birth, but significantly earlier - in the womb."

Fetuses are far more aware and responsive than we had previously given them credit. In the book *Prenatal Parenting*, author Frederick Wirth, M.D. outlines some of the significant fetal developmental milestones that allow for the type of communication necessary for prenatal parenting. He points out the following:

- Emotions develop in the midbrain, which starts developing in early gestation.
- Taste buds start developing at eight weeks and are fully developed by 15 weeks.
- Touch starts developing at sixteen weeks and is fully developed by 23 to 27 weeks.
- Hearing starts developing at 20 weeks and infants start responding to sounds outside the womb at 22 weeks, by 28 weeks infants respond to sounds consistently.

There are three key ways that communication takes place between mother and child during pregnancy. The first, the **physiological**, is the most obvious. Fetuses receive nutrition and oxygen via the placenta from their mothers. They can also receive stress related hormones that way. The second is **behavioral**. One of the most common behavioral ways mothers communicate to their unborn children is by rubbing their pregnant bellies. It has been shown that this gesture is calming to the baby. Babies' most obvious form of behavioral communication is kicking. The third level of communication, what is referred to as "**sympathetic communication**," is the emotional. According to Verny, "the child's emotional radar is so sharp that even the slightest tremors of maternal emotion register with him."

One of the best examples of this ability to respond to a mother's mind is a study that was done on women who smoked during pregnancy. When a woman smokes during pregnancy, the fetus responds with an accelerated heart rate and heaving respiratory movements. By the sixth month of gestation, the fetus has the ability to both learn and remember. What the study found was that when mothers *just thought about smoking* the fetus' heart rate increased and it started gasping.

Given this intimate connection between mother and child there is much you can do to help your child feel connected and safe prior to birth.

Belly rubbing- Rubbing your pregnant abdomen is soothing to your unborn child and it also helps stimulate the baby's brain. This method of calming a kicking baby is very helpful and sends a message to the child that you are paying attention to his needs and that you are able to console him.

Personal Growth- It is especially important to do your own emotional work during pregnancy. In order to reduce stress on your baby it has been recommended that pregnant women focus on: learning to express negative emotions, decrease negative self-talk, and increase self-esteem. Being able to ask for what you want, express yourself, and believe in your abilities are important foundations to pass on to your unborn child.

Fetal Love Breaks- Wirth, who created the concept of "Fetal Love Break" recommends spending 20 minutes during which you play music that fills you with positive feelings out loud, so both you and your baby can hear it. Then fill your senses with a calming, peaceful scene like the beach or mountains. Wirth says this will "program your child's emotional temperament and give him/her the expectation of peace and love in his or her universe after birth."

Talk to Your Baby- Babies recognize their mother's voice and prefer it to other voices. Brain stimuli tell the child to pay attention and that this person is important. Hearing your voice is imperative to the bonding process.

Send Your Baby Love Messages- When we feel peace or love neurotransmitters in our blood cross the placenta to your unborn child and allow him to experience the same feelings. Sending your child messages of love while in utero helps your child to feel your love even before you meet.

Music- Studies show that babies prefer classical music, especially any music that mimics the mother's heartbeat of 60 beats per minute. In a study done by audiologist Michele Clements it was determined that unborn babies have distinct musical taste. Clement found that fetal heart rates steadied and then declined when they were played Vivaldi and Mozart. They were not as fond of Beethoven or rock.

There is much you can do to emotionally begin bonding with your child and prepare him or her for the world prior to birth. I hope this article will give you a good starting point.

Family Magazines
April 2005

Bond with Your Baby Before Birth!



Dr. Jenn with DJs Jamie and Danny from Star 98.7