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SPECIAL EDITION

YOUR CHILD

Newweek

Spring/Summer 1997 \$3.50



From Birth to Three

What You Need
To Know

How Speech
Begins

■
A Baby's Brain

■
Genes &
Emotions

■
What's Normal,
What's Not



Patricia F. Lewis

04/18/97 03:57:08 PM

Record Type: Record

To: Kevin S. Moran/WHO/EOP
cc: Brenda M. Anders/WHO/EOP
Subject: Ann's interview

Eileen Byrne, Working Mother, will call Ann at 10:15 a.m. tomorrow, 4/19, for a 5 minute interview on the conference. (She's looking for a big picture deal -- why it was called, what was said, what happens next...)

Byrne's phone number is 212-546-8020

Fax, 212-546-7220. (Please send her a bio.)

Thanks.



National Center for Infants, Toddlers and Families

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April 17, 1997
7 a.m.

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Parents of Babies and Toddlers Face "Information Deficit" on Healthy Child Development:

National Poll Reveals Less Knowledge about Emotional, Social and Intellectual Development

Washington, D.C. -- A national survey released today by ZERO TO THREE revealed that parents of babies and toddlers have much less knowledge and information about their children's emotional, intellectual and social development than about their physical development. Parents thirst for more information on how to promote their young children's healthy development.

The national poll of more than 1,000 parents, conducted by Peter Hart Research Associates between March 21 and April 1, 1997 and funded by the Heinz Family Foundation, found that while parents know they have an important influence on their children's development, they do not fully understand how their *day-to-day interactions* with their babies and toddlers affect early child development and learning.

Also, while parents believe that what they do as parents has the greatest influence on their children's emotional development, they also say they have the least information in this area.

For example, the majority of parents of children under three (53 percent) feel "totally sure" that they know what signs to watch for to see if their child's physical development is on track. But only 38 percent of parents feel totally sure that they can tell if their young child's emotional development is healthy and about right for his or her age. About two in five parents (44 percent) feel totally sure that they can tell if their infant or toddler's intellectual development is on track; 37 percent feel this way about milestones of social development.

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Almost all parents (95 percent) understand the central message of recent child development research -- that babies are learning from the moment they are born. But parents of infants and toddlers are confused about important details. Many parents **don't** know that:

- *"Stimulation" isn't always good for children.* 87 percent of parents thought that the *more* stimulation a baby receives, the better off he or she is. (In fact, parents and caregivers need to carefully match the amount and kind of stimulation they offer to a baby to that child's level of development, special interests, temperament, and mood at the moment.)
- *Too many changes in caregivers can slow a child's development and leave children reluctant to form new relationships.* Half of all parents thought that the *more* caregivers a child has before age three, the better that child will be at adapting and coping with change. (In fact, when very young children switch repeatedly from one caregiver to another, the time they spend grieving the loss of the old caregiver and learning the new caregiver's ways may slow down their overall development.)
- *Parents' and caregivers' interactions with babies and toddlers influence children's intellectual abilities.* One in four parents either thought or was unsure whether every baby is born with a certain level of intelligence, which cannot be either increased or decreased by how parents interact with him or her. (In fact, parents' involvement and support can enhance young children's problem-solving skills, increase children's curiosity about their environment, and build children's confidence in their own ability to learn.)
- *Babies less than six months old can get depressed.* Less than two-thirds of parents (65 percent) realize that this statement is true. (In fact, experts in child health and development can now identify many emotional problems in very young children and work with families to treat these difficulties.)

In addition, parents' uncertainties lead to a strong desire for more information:

- Though 39 percent of parents believe that they have the **greatest influence** over their children's emotional development (compared to intellectual, social, or physical development), more than one in four parents (26 percent) said that they had the **least information** about emotional development (compared to intellectual, social and physical development).

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- Sixty percent of parents report being extremely or very interested in information on brain development and how young children learn. An additional 21 percent said they were fairly interested.
- Nearly half of all parents of infants and toddlers (46 percent) report they pay serious attention to news reports and newspaper articles about early childhood development issues. In addition, 36 percent regularly look for information in magazines and 39 percent say they pick up literature in their pediatrician's office on a very or fairly regular basis.

Two major barriers exist to better parenting: “an information deficit” and a time crunch:

- One in 5 parents say they feel the need to improve as a parent because they find it hard to understand their child's feeling and needs (19 percent), or don't know how to handle difficult situations with their child (19 percent).
- Almost two in five parents (37 percent) say that one of the chief reasons they may need to improve as parents is that they don't spend as much quality time with their child as they'd like to.
- Half of all parents say they end most days feeling that they spent less time than they wanted to with their young child -- either a lot less time (20 percent) or a little less time (27 percent). With more than 10 million children age birth-to-three in this country, this means that five million infants and toddlers have parents who personally feel they don't spend enough time with them, including two million kids whose moms or dads say they get a lot less time together than they want.

Caregivers other than mothers and fathers play a major role in the lives of young children.

- Only 1 in 5 babies and toddlers have been cared for exclusively by their father or mother since birth.
- Sixty percent of all children under age three are currently cared for on a regular basis by someone other than their parents. This is true for 48 percent of babies from birth to 8 months, 59 percent of children from 9-18 months, and 66 percent of children from 19 months to 3 years old.
- Grandparents are the regular caregivers for 23 percent of babies and toddlers; other family members care regularly for an additional 9 percent of young children.

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- Overall, 16 percent of children from birth to three are in child care centers (8 percent of infants from 0-8 months, 21 percent of children from 19-36 months). 9 percent of infants and toddlers are in family day care.

Survey findings reveal that while parents understand that their children's earliest years powerfully shape later development and learning, they are often unsure about what they should be doing to promote healthy emotional, social, and intellectual development. *The scientific community, communications media, and health and development professionals need to translate research and practice findings into clear, practical messages for parents.*

"Parents need to trust themselves -- they know their children better than anyone else," says Matthew E. Melmed, ZERO TO THREE executive director. "They also need to understand that how they 'are' with their baby has a tremendous impact on the emotional, intellectual and social development of that child. Parents can benefit from the growing knowledge base in these areas."

Parents, grandparents, other family members, and professional caregivers are all sharing the care of today's infants and toddlers. *Child development researchers, families, health care providers, and the early care and education community must share their expertise and experience, and, with the active support of the business community, promote public and private policies that support the healthy development of our nation's infants, toddlers and families.*

ZERO TO THREE, which for 20 years has served as the nexus of the multidisciplinary "infant/family" field, is committed to these goals. ZERO TO THREE will continue to translate scientific research and disseminate it to a wide variety of audiences -- including parents. ZERO TO THREE will also continue to assist individuals, organizations, and policymakers working to address the needs of America's infants, toddlers and families.

Funding for communicating the importance of the earliest years to parents through a ZERO TO THREE public education initiative is being provided by: AETNA Foundation, Inc.; Gerber Companies Foundation; Lynn and Philip Straus; Fannie Mae Foundation; The Harris Foundation; Glickenhau & Co.; and the McCormick Tribune Foundation.

ZERO TO THREE is a national nonprofit dedicated to advancing the healthy development of babies and young children through training infant/family professionals, disseminating scientific and public information, and promoting policy relevant to infants, toddler and their families.

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**KEY FINDINGS FROM A NATIONWIDE SURVEY AMONG
PARENTS OF ZERO- TO THREE-YEAR-OLDS**

**CONDUCTED BY
PETER D. HART RESEARCH ASSOCIATES**

**FUNDED BY THE
HEINZ FAMILY FOUNDATION**



National Center for Infants, Toddlers and Families

APRIL 1997

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