



Volume II, No 8

Ready for Life

With a sprig of hair wisped into a ponytail, eleven-month-old Sarah Mae Hamilton surveys the room with a consuming interest. Curiosity unbound, Sarah Mae reaches out for all that is new, capturing adult affections as easily as she absorbs information about her world.

Sarah Mae is ready for life! She uses her senses to the fullest as she unravels the mysteries of her surroundings: a tongue to taste a ball, a cheek to feel an animal skin, or an ear to catch the crunch of the leaves crackling beneath her feet. Such enrichment through the senses is natural for a child Sarah's age. It's also a key to creating readiness for each new developmental stage.

CREATING READINESS

Sarah Mae's parents, Donna and Gary, are a large factor in Sarah Mae's exuberant readiness. They're relaxed in their child-rearing methods, delighting in the spontaneity of unplanned outings, and integrating teaching into the whole day.

They firmly believe in responding as fully as possible to their daughter's uninhibited curiosity. They plan ways to enrich her environment, providing abundant experiences to stimulate her senses and allow her to develop her abilities.

The Hamiltons recognize a key concept in child development: The satisfaction of Sarah Mae's developmental needs at one stage of growth is the very thing which creates her readiness for the next stage. Missing a developmental experience (such as crawling) could interfere with her development in subsequent stages.

By consciously responding to their youngster's developmental appetites, they keep from forming the obstacles that can be created by parents who simply hope a child will learn what is needed. Thus Sarah is learning at what's called an accelerated rate—actually the result of a process which is quite natural. Because she isn't hindered by a dull environment, Sarah simply gains use of the time which might otherwise be lost to boredom.

THE DEVELOPMENTAL PROFILE

One of the tools which the Hamiltons use for enrichment ideas is "The Institutes' Developmental Profile."* The Profile outlines the stages of development for the first six years of a child's life. It's divided into six categories: visual (including reading), auditory, tactile, (whole body) mobility, (spoken) language and manual competence (including writing).

Each category is divided into seven stages of development. These range from the simplest reflexes at birth to academic skills by age six.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

The Hamiltons started using the Profile when Sarah Mae was a newborn. For example:

VISUAL

To help her develop her ability to see, they started by letting her experience the difference between light and darkness. Sometimes they made a game of turning the lights on and off while pointing out which was light and which was darkness. They helped her to perceive outlines by letting Sarah Mae touch and look at things such as the caning in their bentwood rocker. Donna showed Sarah large pictures which featured only one object at a time, as well as cards with words printed in large, bold lettering. Donna and Gary always identified these things verbally as they showed them to Sarah Mae. They also gave Sarah a set of books which she might look at by herself, and many books which they read to her frequently.

TACTILE

One thing which the Hamiltons did for tactile stimulation was to let Sarah sleep on a washable sheepskin. Studies indicate that babies who sleep on sheepskins gain weight more rapidly and sleep better. Sarah Mae has certainly enjoyed hers.

AUDITORY

For auditory stimulation, Gary and Donna do a lot of talking. When it's raining, they point out the sound of the rain on the roof and talk about where rain comes from. They point out everyday sounds: the refrigerator starting to cool, the phone ringing, the washer in the spin cycle, or the water running in the shower. Since Gary studied weather while getting his pilot's license, he likes to talk with Sarah about it. While he and Sarah look at the sky, he points out cumulus clouds. They have a taller appearance because they're pushed upward by updrafts. Gary is brushing up on his weather studies so he can point out clouds which are indicative of weather changes.

Donna plays cassette tapes which feature Beethoven's symphonies, short biographies of composers, bird calls, and sounds of the English language. She's also teaching Sarah how to recognize the sound and name of each note on a correctly-tuned xylophone.

SPOKEN LANGUAGE

Sarah responds to all this auditory input by making her own sounds. She likes to make musical sounds and really concentrates on learning to pronounce words. Her friendship with several older children has been a great incentive for her to perfect her speech. When her three- to six-year-old friends stop by the house, Sarah Mae is eager to join them in conversation.

MANUAL

Sarah uses her hands to pick up and hold small objects, and she lets Donna guide her hand in tracing letters in sand. This helps Sarah Mae to develop her fine motor coordination and to internalize information she will use when she starts writing.

MOBILITY

Sarah Mae has always been physically active. She loved to crawl on her belly, to creep on her hands and knees and then to walk with the support of furniture. Now she walks unassisted and concentrates on anything which relates to gaining better control of her body. Lots of experience crawling led to creeping; creeping freely prepared her for walking. Each activity, experienced fully, developed optimal readiness for the next.

SEPARATION

The Hamiltons also found a way to help Sarah Mae become ready for short separations from her mother. Sarah Mae and Donna are very close. They have that special bond that comes with remaining in close physical contact in those first precious hours after childbirth. They also share the strong connection that forms between a teaching mother and her child. Donna breastfeeds Sarah and spends hours with her throughout the day. Togetherness is a way of life for them.

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Basic

Principles

THE RELATION BETWEEN *ACCEPTANCE* AND DEVELOPMENT

WHEN PEOPLE FEEL ACCEPTED ...

In a 1975 study by psychologist Lloyd Silverman, 30 obese women went through an eight-week weight-reduction program. Half the women lost an average of eight pounds each; the other half lost an average of only five pounds. In a follow-up check four weeks afterwards, the first group had lost an average of three more pounds each. The second group had gained back a pound.

There was only one difference in the programs followed by the two groups: the higher-weight-loss group had had weekly sessions sitting before a tachistoscope on which a message flashed so fast that they didn't consciously perceive it.* The message was, "Mommy and I are one." The slower-weight-loss group had the same number of sessions with a tachistoscope, but the message flashed for them was, "People are walking," considered by the psychologist to be neutral, or personally unimportant.

Silverman and others have also used the "Mommy-and-I-are-one" phrase subliminally to help people stop smoking, stop drinking, even become better readers. In their September, 1982 article on Silverman for *Science Digest*, Robert Morse and David Stoller tell of a six-week-long test at a movie theater in which, "'Eat Popcorn' ... flashed on the screen every five seconds for about one one-thousandth of a second during the film. The test proved a dramatic success: popcorn sales at the lobby concession reportedly shot up by 57.5%..."

Apparently when the subconscious receives a message not contradictory to its basic morality, there is a tendency for the conscious to act as if it were so: receiving "Eat Popcorn" increases the probability of buying and eating pop-corn; receiving, "Mommy and I are one" seems to facilitate self-improvement.

Why? When people feel thoroughly, unconditionally accepted just as they are, they are freer to make decisions that are for their own growth, and freer to follow through on those decisions.

THE ROOTS OF FEELING ACCEPTED

The first experience a child has of acceptance or non-acceptance—as far as science knows now—is as a fetus in *utero*; and later in the touching, holding, caring behaviors of his or her mother. In fact the main task of the first few months in everyone's life is for the mother and child to become attuned, to become as one, to develop a state of psychological symbiosis—to feel thoroughly accepted by each other, In other words, in the first few months of life children are supposed to get the message, "Mommy and I are one."

FEELING POORLY ACCEPTED

Children who've felt a low degree of acceptance from infancy on tend to hold on to their early perception about what life is like; so they tend to make and follow through on decisions that are destructive to—non-accepting of—themselves (decisions like overeating, smoking, drinking too much, blocking learning, or any of the thousands of other forms non-health can take).

When such a person receives reinforcement of the old subconscious message, however weak, of acceptance from Mother, the effect is usually to accept oneself more fully and to turn toward health.

FEELING RICHLY ACCEPTED

Children who've felt a high degree of acceptance from infancy on are quite different. Have you read Jean Liedloff's *The Continuum Concept*? If so you remember the richly accepting way children are reared among the Yequana Indians of South America: held throughout infancy, taken everywhere with their mothers, allowed to crawl or creep away to explore whenever they wished, knowing their mothers would always be available when they returned. Of the daily bath each mother and her baby took in a river, Liedloff writes, "Every move bespoke sensual enjoyment, and the babies were handled like objects so marvelous that their owners felt constrained to put a mock-modest face on their pleasure and pride."

This consistent early acceptance became their prototype of all future experiences. "What a baby encounters is what he feels the nature of life to be." These babies grew up assuming their own rightness, their full acceptance by the world and everyone in it. As children they were, "Uniformly well-behaved, never fought, were never punished, always obeyed happily and instantly." As adults they were, "The happiest people I had seen anywhere."

IT'S A CYCLE

The Yequana mothers were able to accept their babies so naturally because they had had such thorough acceptance from their own mothers and culture. We accept our children to whatever degree we do largely because our mothers and culture passed on to us the degree of acceptance they'd received. It's a cycle.

BREAKING INTO THE CYCLE

Psychiatrist Ross Campbell breaks into that cycle by teaching parents. He usually works with parents very much like most of us "good" parents who love their children. Many of their children, though, haven't gotten the message; they feel angry, hopeless, alienated. Campbell teaches these parents in his office. The rest of us he teaches in his little book *How to Really Love Your Child*. What he teaches is how to get our children to feel accepted by us—accepted just as they are. His methods are few and simple. They are to give children three things in abundance—relaxed eye contact, affectionate physical contact, and positive focused attention. What he says about each is wise and helpful, and doable, even with all our imperfections.

FOR EXAMPLE ...

A busy young couple took their few-weeks-old infant with them to a class on the relationship between our bodies and our emotions. Since birth the baby had cried almost constantly when awake; both parents felt harried and weary. The instructor of the session took their tiny daughter from them and held her quietly, looking calmly into her eyes and focusing all his attention on her. Her crying began to subside. She looked back at him, studying him, as if she were absorbing some sort of communication from him, soaking up his total concentration on her. Soon her body relaxed. She became content.

When he returned her to her parents, the instructor recommended that they hold their daughter as much as possible, calmly, while they look into her eyes, giving her their focused attention frequently each day. When they did, the baby's incessant crying stopped. She became a part of their lives—not just an object to care for but accepted by them as a real person. Some of the busyness dropped away. They began the process of becoming a family.

Looking, touching, giving complete attention are emotional food for children. They are ways to help a child decide, "I am accepted, I am loved." That is the most important decision children ever make. They spend the rest of their lives acting on it, feeling safe in the world, feeling free to learn and grow.

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J.C.

* Such unconscious messages are called "subliminal" communication. When sent by unscrupulous persons without the receiver's consent, they are a form of brainwashing and mind control—a very real threat to our basic personal freedom. Even when subliminal messages are used well, though—for therapeutic purposes, by a principled sender, with the receiver's consent—if used often they can lower the threshold of will, and so lessen one's ability to think independently.

To Mother — or Father — is to Teach

by Joanna Carnahan

DEFINITELY WORTH TRYING

“I want Jami! I want Jami, Mommy!” Mary and I had taken Jami and Elizabeth Ann, our four-year-old daughters, on an excursion for most of the day. Going home, Mary had asked that I let her and Jami out at a grocery store near their apartment.

As I pulled over to the curb, Elizabeth Ann realized that Jami was about to leave her. “I want Jami to come home with us. Is it all right if she spends the night with me, Mommy? Please? We want to play.”

I agreed that Jami might come for a while, but Mary didn’t think so. Skillfully she talked Jami out of the car and into the supermarket.

Jami accepted Mary’s decision with little resistance; Elizabeth Ann didn’t.

As I pulled the car out into traffic, she began crying and asking repeatedly for Jami, feeling helpless and angry about this unfair turn of events.

Immediately I began reasoning with her, “Oh, Honey, Mary probably thought Jami was tired and wanted to take her home for a rest. You’ll get to be with Jami another day!”

Crying. Whining. “I want Jami!”

“How about tomorrow?” Brightly. “What do you think about that? We can call tonight and invite Jami over for tomorrow. All right? Would you like that?”—More crying. Utter unhappiness.

Perhaps if I just stopped talking for a while she would wind down. Traffic was heavy and slow. The crying was beginning to be wearing. I tried silence, for maybe two or three long minutes. The crying continued. “I want Jami, Mommy.”

Normally at that point I would have gotten angry and told her to stop crying immediately, but this time,

for some reason, anger didn’t come next. Instead a brand new tactic came to mind—new that is, in my mothering.

The book or two I’d read on effective communication for parents called it, “acknowledging feelings,” or “accepting emotions,” and there, in the middle of crying and traffic, an example from one of the books came to mind.

As I remembered it, a mother was in a car with two children who were begging to stop for a drink, insisting over and over that they were very thirsty. She couldn’t stop, and couldn’t stop their begging, until she thought of acknowledging their condition and granting their wish in fantasy. “Boy! You two are really thirsty. You’re so thirsty you feel like a desert inside. You’re so thirsty that you wish you had two gallons of apple juice right now. You probably even wish the whole back seat were filled with apple juice!”

The children listened, felt acknowledged, started giggling about their mother’s exaggeration, and began concocting their own fantastic images of how much apple juice they could drink.

They’d gone from whines to giggles in under two minutes! It was definitely, at this point, worth a try.

“Elizabeth Ann, you really want to be with Jami. You miss her, and you wish she hadn’t left. You’re feeling lone-some and sad. You’d feel completely happy if Jami were here right now.”

Silence. As I began talking, Elizabeth Ann’s crying subsided. She watched me intently as I described her feelings. Then she curled up beside me, looking content, and was quiet all the way home.

She felt heard, acknowledged, accepted. I felt wonderful—and surprised! The best part, though, was feeling so effective, as if I’d gotten an “A” in Mothering. I’d try that again sometime! □

(continued from page 2)

When Sarah was six to eight months old, Donna and Gary found a natural way to strengthen Sarah Mae's bonds to her father. They noticed that when Sarah was inside the house she was preoccupied with her mother. If her father took her outside, though, she could happily, spend hours with him alone.

Now Gary takes her to where he works and points out the equipment at the plastics factory. He identifies the parts of the injection molding machines, shows her different types of plastics and lets her touch the parts which the machines produce. He continues this

education at home by identifying various types of plastics in the house.

Many repetitions of all these experiences strengthen Sarah Mae's present abilities and simulataneously enlarge her capacity to take in new ones.

Sarah Mae still confronts obstacles to her understanding, but the richness of her experiences helps her to more readily meet the challenge. For, thanks to the efforts of her parents, this little girl is ready—ready for life, ready for love, ready to learn anything! □

* The *Profile* is available to parents who take The Better Baby Course through The Institutes for the Achievement of Human Potential, 8801 Stenton Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19118. The course explains the use of the Profile (and many other tools) in an easy-to-understand format. The book *Human Neurological Organization*, by Edward B. Le Winn, gives a scholarly overview of the original Doman-Delacato Profile. The book is available through the Institutes' bookstore.

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