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Is Laughter Good Medicine for Stressed Parents and their Babies?

November 24, 2008 10:04 AM EST

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I remember a father worrying about his one-month-old baby because she was not smiling. In general, babies start to become social around one month of age. They may start making eye contact, smiling, and cooing. However, some are not quite ready to make this social leap. Most catch up at a later date.

It certainly helps if you smile and laugh with your baby. Sometimes new parents are so anxious to do all the right things that they forget to laugh and have fun with their baby. If you tend to have a sober personality, it may be that your baby will inherit that. But smiles and laughter go a long way in relaxing the household and encouraging a warm, fun relationship with your offspring.

In the first few months of your baby's life, your relationship will probably involve cuddling, feeding, changing diapers, soothing tears and gas, and pacing back and forth. Why not start communicating with your baby by singing, talking, and laughing with him? It is fun to tickle a baby, and it is bound to get a giggle. I know of no harmful side effects of this "silly" behavior, and it is a lot of fun.

Many first-time parents bring their babies in to see me because they are anxious that they are not doing enough or are doing the wrong thing. I tell these new parents to relax and enjoy their baby! Babies do funny things, and it is OK to laugh.

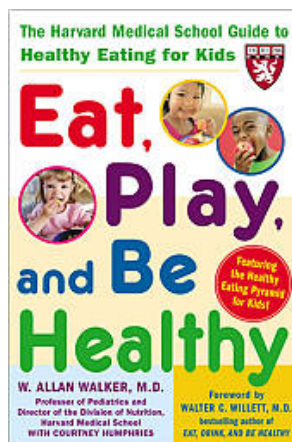
Some parents even object to baby talk, as if this infantile speech will somehow prevent the baby from becoming a serious, well-educated adult. But I know of no bad outcomes from early use of baby talk. The only harm may be if you continue to use it beyond infancy and toddlerhood.

New parents may also find themselves marveling at the ridiculous lingo they have adopted since the baby was born. A hard-driving attorney or Wall Street executive may be reduced to nursery rhymes and using words like "gobbledy gook." And I say, "Hurray to that!" One of the joys of parenthood is that it allows you to be a kid again yourself.

Many of you have heard that "laughter is the best medicine." I am not sure who said that first, but I am a true believer of this type of remedy. Love and laugh often with your baby. You will find that laughter is often all it takes to right a household tense from baby anxiety.

What do you do to make your baby laugh? Any funny baby stories that had you on the floor laughing?

Dr. Victoria McEvoy graduated from Harvard Medical School in 1975 and is currently an Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at HMS. She is the Medical Director and Chief of Pediatrics at Mass General West Medical Group. She has practiced pediatrics for almost thirty years. She has been married to Earl for thirty six years and raised four children. She currently enjoys writing, traveling, reading, almost all sports, and spending time with her two grandsons.



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