



ATLAS *of* MOTHERHOOD

FOUR CONCEPTS
EVERY MOTHER
SHOULD KNOW
ABOUT NEWBORN
DEVELOPMENT

For Atlas of Motherhood by Dr. Siobhan Kennedy-Costantin



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Hi, I'm Siobhan. I'm a mother, a Scientist and an advocate for parents and families. I help Science Minded parents, like you, become more informed, giving you the confidence to make choices that feel right for you and your family. I started Science Minded to bridge this gap and connect parents who are open to learning about their child and themselves. Knowledge is power, and being informed allows us to be confident in our decisions, parent without reservation and better connect with our families.

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4 CONCEPTS MOTHERS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT NEWBORN DEVELOPMENT

It is important during pregnancy to spend some time thinking about who your baby is and the ways we may be able to ease their journey into the world. Learning more about how children develop, how their brains and psychology works can make our lives and our baby's lives that much easier.

1

AFFECTION

Babies thrive on affection and love. They are born into this world expecting to be cuddled, nurtured, held, and to be loved. They have spent 9 months in your womb which is this cosy, warm, lovely place, that's noisy, wet, dark, and then they are born into this world that is noisy (in a different way), cold, separated from you, and they don't know what to make of things.

Womb	World
Dark	Light
Muffled sounds	Loud noises
Constant warm temperature	Fluctuating temperature
Constant nutrition	Hunger & thirst
Confined space	Lots of space
Aquatic	Air
Inability to smell	Many different smells
Constant contact with mother	Dramatically reduced contact
Constantly 'held'	Held far less
Naked	Clothed
All surroundings soft and warm	Many surroundings hard and cold

HELPING YOUR NEWBORN ADJUST: WOMB TO WORLD

What we can do to help them through this transition from womb to world is to comfort them.

Helping Your Newborn Adjust to the World Checklist

- Hold your baby
- Cuddle your baby
- Swaddle your baby
- Skin to skin contact
- Feed your baby
- Soothe your baby to sleep
- Shushing
- Swaying motion
- Parent self-care

Babies need all of this love and affection because they are born too early, meaning that a newborn baby's brain and body are vulnerable and immature. For example, most mammals are able to walk soon after they are born, but for humans it takes a year until we can walk. If gestation went to the perfect length for the human baby it would be more than 20 months long!

- In order for us to walk upright, our pelvises are narrow, so if our babies were born at the right time for their brain development, they would be too big to fit through our narrow pelvis. As a result, babies are born early enough to still fit through the pelvis, but too early for their brain development.
- Because babies are born too “early” and essentially helpless, they require a lot of love, affection, and attention.
- Babies need all of this love and affection because they are born “missing the womb,” and much of their fussing and neediness has to do with a feeling of disorientation and an inability to self-soothe without assistance.

This is why those first six weeks postpartum, or after your baby is born, is described as the fourth trimester: a time of increased vulnerability, where we really need to think about our babies and find ways to nurture and protect them and their brain development.

In society there have been lots of ways to account for this and solve this. For example, in a lot of Asian countries, there is the concept of confinement following birth. Confinement is described as a period of time following birth where the mother and baby are confined to the bedroom and their only job is to feed (breastfeed for baby and nourishing foods for the mother) and it's everyone else's job to do everything else. Although this isn't possible for everyone, it's important to find ways to try and slow down during the first 40 days of our newborn's life.

There's so much pressure in our society to bounce back and be the productive and capable mother and while some people can do that and that works for them, it's not necessarily ideal. During the fourth trimester, give your body the time it needs to heal and give your baby's brain and sensory capacities calm, quiet, comfort, and cuddles.

EXPERT TIP: You can not spoil a baby with too many cuddles.

2

MOVEMENT

Babies love to move! Babies (all humans in general) learn through experience. We learn to navigate and understand how and why our world works, through our experiences and various inputs.

Before our babies can move independently, they like to be moved around. Babies love new and different experiences which are often given to them through movement.

Once babies are old enough to start moving around themselves, they will do this in order to seek new experiences. Every time a baby is moving or reaching new motor milestones they're experiencing the world in an entirely different way.

Exercise:

- Get on your hands and knees and take a look around, then kneel, and then stand up.
- Take a moment to think about how you view your environment from each of these different vantage points.
- In the same way, each time your baby does this as they grow and develop, they are learning to experience the world in a new and exciting way.

YES SPACES

As your baby develops, it's really important to offer your baby different opportunities to experience and interact with the world.

“Yes Spaces” are places where your baby can do whatever they want (within reason and levels of safety.) A Yes Space creates safe opportunities for your baby to engage with the world that you have set up to be completely baby proof and baby friendly. The goal is to intervene as little as possible when your baby is in this space so it needs to be designed with their safety and developmental needs in mind so that you feel totally comfortable letting them play there.

Yes Space Checklist

- Put things that are interesting to your baby at their level that they can reach
- Put objects just out of reach to encourage your baby to explore

Babies are curious and really want to move, explore, and interact with the world. However sometimes these are the very acts that can leave us frustrated. As parents we want our children to grow into adults that are curious, perseverant, determined, and interested, but we can't expect them to have these traits as adults, if we are getting frustrated at these same traits in childhood.

A way around this way of thinking:

Stop



Re-frame our thinking: when your baby is pulling things down, remind yourself they are not misbehaving, they're just trying to explore their world.



Think about what your baby will be able to reach and make sure that the things they can reach are safe to be playing with and interesting for them to explore.

3

SOCIALIZATION

Babies are social creatures with social needs. Babies are born into the world expecting to interact socially. Historically, we were raised in villages, so your baby is biologically inclined to be interacting with lots of people and experiencing varied social interactions.

The pandemic has made this challenging, meaning that a lot of us are raising our babies in a time of social isolation. Which brings the question: how is isolation affecting my baby? Is it ruining their development?

- **Short answer is no.** Babies and children are resilient and find a way to adapt. Babies don't know what they don't know (that the world used to be open and that we didn't have to wear masks).
- **Longer answer** is that it's not totally known yet how the pandemic is affecting babies. Early studies suggest that pandemic babies can be less familiar with socialization. So if we have been in that time of isolation because of the pandemic, we need to be patient with our babies because they are not used to other people in these different environments and it might take your baby a little longer to get used to meeting some family members for the first time or going to the park. Give your baby the time and space they need to explore things in their own time and in their own way.

4

CULTURE

Culture does not erase a baby's innate needs. Specifically in Western culture and society, we are taught that babies should be independent immediately, that babies don't need us, and that they should figure it out. However, what we know about a baby's biological and psychological development does not support this concept. Babies are born too early gestationally for their brain development, and born helpless, so why would we expect them to be independent?

We need to rethink what babies and parents need biologically and ways that we can shift our narratives to support biologically and physiologically appropriate development.

Remember, you can not spoil a baby! Babies need love and affection, they need to be cuddled, they need to be held, they need to be supported and giving them these things doesn't spoil a baby; it gives them loving, long-lasting relationships with their caregivers which is what we, as parents, want with our child.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND CHILD DEVELOPMENT IN BECOMING A PARENT

Knowledge is power! The more that we, as parents, know about our baby's development, the more we can do to support our baby's development. Having a newborn baby (or a child of any age) is confusing: they are constantly doing new and different things and because they don't have the language, they don't have the capacity to explain how or why they are doing what they are doing and they are constantly changing, so it can be challenging as a new parent to have no idea what is going on or have too many ideas of what is going on and not able to pinpoint one.

When we understand more about child development and how our babies brains are working, it's not so much that we have all the answers, but that we have this foundation and understanding that we can allow ourselves to work from. Knowledge can help us to not feel stressed out and instead have an understanding on how and why these things are happening.



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