

Top Tips *from the*

BABY WHISPERER:

*Secrets to Calm, Connect and
Communicate with your Baby*

*'She achieves what, to
hard-pressed parents,
seem like miracles'
Mail on Sunday*

TRACY HOGG

with Melinda Blau



Top Tips from the Baby Whisperer

Secrets to Calm, Connect and
Communicate with your Baby

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Introduction

Becoming the Baby Whisperer

Let me tell you straight away: I didn't dub myself 'the baby whisperer'. One of my clients did. But I kind of like it, because it does describe what I do.

Perhaps you already know what a 'horse whisperer' does, or possibly you've read the book or seen the movie of the same name. If so, you might remember how Robert Redford's character dealt with the wounded horse, advancing towards it slowly and patiently, listening and observing, but respectfully keeping his distance as he pondered the poor beast's problem. Taking his time, he finally approached the horse, looked it straight in the eye, and talked softly. The entire time, the horse whisperer stayed as steady as a rock and maintained his own sense of serenity, which, in turn, encouraged the horse to calm down.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not comparing newborns to horses (although both are sensate animals), but it's pretty much the same with me and babies. Parents think I have some special gift, but there's really nothing mysterious about what I do, nor is it a talent that only certain people possess. Baby whispering is a matter of respecting, listening, observing and interpreting. You can't learn it overnight - I've watched and whispered to over 5,000 thousand babies. But any parent can learn; every parent

should learn. I understand infants' language, and I can teach you the skills you'll need to master it, too.

CHAPTER ONE

The Arrival of Your Newborn

The first three to five days are often the most difficult because everything is new and daunting. The first thing I tell parents – and keep telling them – is to slooooooow down. It takes time to get to know your baby. It takes patience and a calm environment. It takes strength and stamina. It takes respect and kindness. It takes responsibility and discipline. It takes attention and keen observation. It takes time and practice – a lot of doing it wrong before you get it right. And it takes listening to your own intuition.

Notice how often I repeat ‘it takes’. In the beginning, there’s a lot of ‘take’ and very little ‘give’ on your baby’s part.

Every baby is different, which is why I tell my mums that their first job is to understand the baby they have, not the one they dreamed about during the nine months of pregnancy.

Coming Home

Because I see myself as an advocate for the whole family, not just the new baby, part of my job is to help parents gain perspective. I tell mums and dads right from the start: this won’t last for ever. You will calm down. You will become more confident. And at some point, believe it or not, your baby will sleep through the night. For now, though, you must lower your expectations. You’ll have good days and not-so-good days; be prepared for both.

The more organised you are before you come home, the happier everyone will be afterwards.

Arriving home

I advise a slow re-entry. When you walk through the door, take a deep, centring breath. Keep it simple. Start the dialogue by giving your baby a tour of the house. That's right, a tour, as if you're the curator of a museum and she's a distinguished visitor. Walk around with her in your arms and show her where she's going to live. Talk to her. In a soft, gentle voice, explain each room: 'Here's the kitchen. It's where Dad and I cook. This is the bathroom, where we have showers.' And so on. You might feel silly. Many new parents are shy when they first start to have a dialogue with their baby. That's okay. Practise, and you'll be amazed at how easy it becomes. Remember to respect your baby. You need to treat your little darling like a human being, as someone who can understand and feel. Granted, she speaks a language you may not yet understand, but it's nevertheless important to call her by name and to make every interaction a dialogue, not a lecture.

When you rock your baby, sway backwards and forwards, not side to side or up and down. Before your baby was born, she sloshed around inside you front to back as you walked, so she's used to, and comforted by, that kind of movement.

Limit visitors. Convince all but a few very close relatives and friends to stay away for the first few days. If parents are in from out of town, the greatest favours they can do for you are cooking, cleaning, and running errands. Let them know, in a kind way, that you'll ask for their help with the baby if you need it, but that you'd like to use this time to get to know your little one on your own. While you're

walking around, Dad or Grandma could perhaps make some camomile tea or another calming beverage.

Give your baby a sponge bath and a feed. Keep in mind that you're not the only one in shock. Your baby has had quite a journey himself. This is a perfect opportunity for you to pore over your miracle of nature. It may be the first time you see your baby naked. Get acquainted with his bits and pieces. Explore each tiny finger and toe. Keep talking to him. Bond with him. Nurse him or give him a bottle. Watch him as he gets sleepy. Start him off right, and allow him to fall asleep in his own cot or moses basket. Hospital nurseries are kept quite warm, almost womb-like, so make sure the temperature in the baby's new 'woom' is around 22°C (72°F).

Homecoming Checklist

- Put sheets on the cot, crib or moses basket.
- Set up the changing table. Have everything you need – wipes, nappies, cotton wool, etc – within easy reach.
- Have baby's first wardrobe ready. Take everything out of the packages, remove any tags, and wash in a mild detergent that has no bleach.
- Stock your fridge and freezer. A week or two before you're due, make a lasagne, a shepherd's pie, soups and other dishes that freeze well. Make sure you have all the staples on hand – milk, butter, eggs, cereal, pet food. You'll eat better and more cheaply, and will avoid frantic trips to the shops.
- Don't take too much to the hospital. Remember, you'll have several extra bags – and the baby – to bring home.

Take small bites

You've got a lot on your plate; don't heap on any additional pressures. Give yourself a manageable number of daily goals and prioritise your tasks by creating piles marked 'urgent', 'do later', and 'can wait till I feel better'. If you're calm and honest when you assess each chore, you'll be surprised at how much goes in that last pile.

It is also important during the early days to take naps during the day. When the baby sleeps, take advantage of it. Babies take a few days to recuperate from the shock of birth. It's not unusual for a one-or two-day-old newborn to sleep for six hours at a stretch, which gives you a little time to recuperate from your own trauma.

A word about pets

Animals can get jealous of new babies – after all, it's like bringing another child home. I advise parents never to leave a baby alone with any pet.

Dogs

You can't actually talk to your dog to prepare it, but you can bring home a blanket or nappy from the hospital to get it used to the baby's smell. When you come home from the hospital, get Rover to meet the new arrival outside the house, before you go in. Dogs are very territorial and likely not to welcome a stranger. It helps if they've become accustomed to the baby's scent.

Cats

It's an old wives' tale that cats like to lie on babies' faces, but cats are certainly attracted to that little lump of warmth. Keeping the cat out of the nursery is the best way to prevent it from jumping into the cot and curling up with your baby. Your baby's lungs are very tender. Cat hair and fine dog hair, such as that on a Jack Russell, can cause an allergic reaction, and even bring on asthma.

Getting to Know Your Baby

In my experience, I've found that infants generally fit into one of five broad temperamental types, which I call *Angel*, *Textbook*, *Touchy*, *Spirited* and *Grumpy*. I describe each below. To help you look at your baby, I've made up a 20-item multiple-choice test that applies to healthy babies from five days old to eight months. Bear in mind that during the first two weeks, there may be apparent changes in temperament that are actually quite temporary. For example, circumcision (often done on the eighth day) or any type of birth abnormality such as jaundice (which makes babies sleepy) may obscure a baby's true nature.

I suggest that both you and your partner answer the questions separately. If you're a single mum or dad, enlist the cooperation of your own parent, a sibling or other relative, a good friend, a childcare worker – in short, anyone who has spent time around your baby.

The know-your-baby quiz

For each of the following questions, pick the best answer – in other words, the statement that describes your child most of the time.

1. My baby
 - A. rarely cries
 - B. cries only when she's hungry, tired or over-stimulated
 - C. cries for no apparent reason
 - D. cries very loudly, and if I don't attend to it, she quickly gets into a rage cry
 - E. cries a lot of the time
2. When it's time for him to go to sleep, my baby
 - A. lies peacefully in his crib and drifts off to sleep

- B. generally falls asleep easily within 20 minutes
- C. fusses a bit and seems to be drifting off, but then keeps waking up
- D. is very restless and often needs to be swaddled or held
- E. cries a lot and seems to resent being put down

3. When she wakes up in the morning, my baby

- A. rarely cries – she plays in her crib until I come in
- B. coos and looks around
- C. needs immediate attention or she starts crying
- D. screams
- E. whimpers

4. When I take my baby on any kind of outing, he

- A. is extremely portable
- B. is okay as long as where I take him isn't too busy or unfamiliar
- C. fusses a great deal
- D. is very demanding of my attention
- E. doesn't like to be handled a lot

5. When confronted by a friendly stranger cooing at her, my baby

- A. immediately smiles
- B. takes a moment and then usually smiles fairly quickly
- C. is likely to cry at first, unless the stranger can win her over
- D. gets very excited
- E. hardly ever smiles

6. When there's a loud noise, like a dog barking or a slamming door, my baby

- A. is never rattled
- B. notices it but isn't bothered
- C. flinches visibly and often starts to cry
- D. gets loud himself
- E. starts to cry

7. When I first gave my baby a bath, she

- A. took to the water like a duck
- B. was a little surprised at the sensation, but liked it almost immediately
- C. was very sensitive - she shook a little and seemed afraid
- D. was wild - flailing about and splashing
- E. hated it and cried

8. My baby's body language is typically

- A. relaxed and alert almost always
- B. relaxed most of the time
- C. tense and very reactive to external stimuli
- D. jerky - his arms and legs are often flailing all over the place
- E. rigid - arms and legs are often fairly stiff

9. When I change my baby's nappy, bathe her or dress her, she

- A. always takes it in her stride
- B. is okay if I do it slowly and let her know what I'm doing
- C. is often cranky, as if she can't stand being naked