Until you start understanding that everybody's child is yours, the world won't be good for any of our children.

Susan Sarandon

Six Months Old

As Baby continues to develop, he must build each new achievement on those which have gone before. Now when you pull him from a lying to a sitting position, he lifts his head strongly and actively co-operates by pulling with his arms. He sits well in a high chair with little or no additional support, although if the high chair is a large one, he may still need a pillow at his back to fill up the extra space.

If you sit him on the floor, the six-month-old baby usually can sit alone for 5-10 seconds by leaning forward and using his hands and arms for support. His back is rounded and he sags forward unless he props himself on his arms.

About half of all six-month-old babies can roll over from back to stomach easily in either direction. Once on his stomach, Baby continues to improve his way of pulling and kicking himself along the floor or bed and turning himself around. He may roll over and over to reach his goal, or roll onto his back and push himself along with his feet. Generally, however, he will prefer lying on his stomach.

Baby has improved his reaching coordination and purposefully reaches for things when he sees them. Sitting in his high chair, he is now usually able to reach for and grasp a dangling toy. This kind of reach and grasp requires much more control than taking an object from the tray or someone's hand. He probably will grasp the object in his palm, but soon will start to use his thumb as well as his fingers to hold it. During this month he may begin to reach for a toy with one hand instead of two. ■

At Six Months Baby Likes to:

- Roll over.
- Mouth a teether or spoon.
- Smile at familiar faces.
- Drop, throw or bang things.

Give Your Baby:

- Household objects such as plastic cups, spoons and small pot lids.
- A ball to roll and clutch.
- Mouthing toys.

Ask Your Doctor About:

- 3rd DTaP vaccine.
- H. Influenzae type b (Hib) vaccine.
- Hepatitis B vaccine (Hep B).
- IPV (inactive polio vaccine).
- PCV (pneumococcal conjugate vaccine).
- Rotavirus (Rota) vaccine.

New View, New Interests

Now that Baby is sitting alone, his view of the world is full of many new things. For the first time there is a dimension of up and down, as well as a to-and-fro direction.

No more will he be content to just sit and watch the scene or grasp nearby objects. Soon, something new and dramatic will happen: Baby will hold an object in his hand and hit it against something else.

Here we see how separate processes of development begin to work together. In order to be able to sit upright, even with support, he needs to have developed the necessary muscles and sense of balance.

As soon as he can sit with support in an upright position, his arms will be free. Over the next few months those arms will be moving up and down.

With this newly developed ability, he will be able to lift an object and bring it down on a flat surface like the floor or a table top.

Reaching for, grasping, and moving the object involves the development of eye-hand coordination skills.

The entire activity requires a remarkable combination of interconnected abilities and skills that enable Baby to strive toward and reach new levels of learning.

Right now what Baby does with an object is mostly a matter of what he himself has learned which, of course, builds on the potential with which he was born.

For instance, when Baby could first pick up an object, he may have shaken it by chance. This gave him a different feeling

continued on page 42

Six Month Milestones

At six months, Baby is already halfway through her first year ... and it's time to take inventory of just what a "typical" baby is doing now.

Our description uses the Descriptive Scale of Developmental Progress by Mary D. Sheridan, with cross-references to the Denver Developmental Screening Scale and a more recent Developmental Assessment published by Haskins and Squires.

Posture and Large Movements
When lying on her back, the typical six-month-old raises her head from the pillow to look at her feet. She also will lift her legs straight up in the air and grasp one foot, perhaps bringing it to her mouth. She moves her arms strongly and purposefully, holding them up to be lifted. When her hands are held, she braces her shoulders and pulls herself to a sitting position. She kicks strongly, alternating legs, and can roll over from front to back and often from back to front.

When lying prone, our typical six-month-old lifts her head and chest strongly, supporting herself on flattened palms and straight arms. She sits easily with support in a chair, and turns her head from side to side to look around. When held sitting (held by the arms) on a firm surface, she holds her head firmly erect and sits with a straight back. She may sit alone momentarily.

When held standing with feet touching a hard surface, she will bear weight on her feet and actively bounce up and down.

Vision and Fine Movement
The typical six-month-old never stops visually examining her surroundings. Everything that moves, everything that is new or different, and everything that is within reach attracts her eager attention.

She follows an adult's activities from across the room. Her eyes move in unison—as a team. Any deviation from this, such as a wandering eye or one that is even slightly crossed, is considered abnormal.

Interesting small objects—toys, small blocks, etc.—six to twelve inches away are focused on immediately, and she reaches out with both hands to grasp and examine them.

She still uses her whole hand to grasp, but now passes a toy back and forth from one hand to the other. She may even transfer one toy to the other hand, and reach for or accept a second toy. When a toy falls from her hand, she usually watches where it lands—if it lands where she can see it. If it falls where she can't see it, she will just forget it, or may search for it vaguely with eyes and patting hands. As yet she has not established a concept of "object permanence." Most objects still cease to exist for her when she can no longer see them.

Hearing and Speech
Her parent's voice from across the room gets immediate turning response from the typical six-month-old. She also shows evidence of selective response to different emotional tones of her parent's voice.

She is now making a wide variety of pre-speech sounds. She laughs, chuckles and squeals aloud in play. She vocalizes tunefully to herself and others using sing-song vowel sounds in single or double combinations. She babbles this way as much for her own amusement as in response to others. She also screams in annoyance or anger. She may initiate speech sounds or other play sounds, although these still are not words.

Social Behavior and Play
Six-month-old hands reach for and grasp any small object within reach. Everything is taken to the mouth for further exploration.

The typical six-month-old finds feet just as interesting as hands, and often uses one foot and one hand to hold objects for observation. She will work hard to get an object that is out of reach. She attends somewhat doubtfully to peek-a-boo, but is learning to enjoy it.

When offered a rattle or a similar sound-maker, she will reach for it at once and shake it deliberately to make the sound. Often she will watch it closely as she shakes it.

Much solitary playtime is spent in manipulating objects, passing them from hand to hand, to mouth, to hand while watching attentively as she turns them over and over.

While usually still friendly with everyone, in another month she may become reserved with strangers.

All in all, the typical six-month-old is quite a person. The first half-year of life has been a busy one, and some major developmental steps have been achieved. ■

Developmental Checklist—Six Months

Social/Emotional

- Exhibits friendliness toward strangers, but slightly uneasy yet when parents are not present.
- Puts hand on breast or bottle while drinking, and may pat gently.
- Responds selectively to the emotional tones of parents' voices.
- Smiles, laughs and squeals.
- Explores with head and eyes.

Communication

- Turns head to parent's voice, even if across the room.
- Babbles using single and repetitive syllables.
- Locates a sound by looking (produced at a distance of 18" to the side of each ear).

Vision

- Eyes follow activities from one side to the other.
- Both eyes move in unison.

Motor (Fine)

- Uses whole hand (palmar grasp) to obtain objects.
- Reaches with two hands for objects up to one foot away.
- Transfers objects from one hand to the other.

Motor (Gross)

- Kicks strongly.
- Kicks alternately with both legs.
- Pulls self up from back-lying when hands are grasped.
- When lying prone on stomach, supports self on extended arms and lifts head and chest strongly.
- Rolls over front to back.
- Sits alone briefly.
- Keeps head and back straight when held in a sitting position.
- When lying on back, brings legs up and over chest, and can grasp and bring one foot to mouth. ■

These milestones are guidelines only. All babies do not develop at the same speed, nor do they spend the same amount of time at each stage of their development. Usually a baby is ahead in some areas, behind in others and "typical" in still other areas. The concept of the "typical" child describes the general characteristics of children at a given age.

One Language Or Two?

We hear from many parents who either speak more than one language in the home, or who want their child to learn a second language.

The questions they ask most often are when is the best time to start a second language, and won't the child be confused by trying to learn two languages at the same time?

There is some experimental evidence that a child who is exposed to the influence of two languages before she arrives at a fair degree of understanding and proficiency in one language is sometimes delayed in language development.

This delay is not permanent but may be observed particularly when the child starts to talk around the second year. There are differences in bilingualism based on the time and circumstances under which two languages are acquired.

Some children may regularly hear two different languages spoken at home, depending, perhaps, on the mood of the parent.

This is known as compound bilingualism, when a child is exposed to both languages interchangeably.

Obviously such children have to learn two different words for every object. As a result of their initial confusion, their development of each language may be delayed, especially in the early stages.

Coordinate bilingualism means the child learns two languages but the experiences are quite distinct.

The child's parents speak essentially one language at home while the second language is heard from peers and learned at school.

The consequence is often deficiency in the use of the second language.This does not mean, however, that children cannot learn two languages at the same time.

Parents who wish their child to learn a second language, or bilingual parents who speak two languages in the home should consider a workable strategy to simplify the introduction of two languages in early childhood.

One idea is to designate specific times or places where each language is to be spoken regularly. For example, one language can be spoken in the home during the daytime hours, while the second is spoken in the evening. This avoids the confusion of switching from one language to another during a given time period.

Learning a second language can continue and extend the rich cultural heritage from one's family as well as span the generations. ■

Who is the "Typical" Baby?

From time to time in your reading you may find statements such as this: "The typical baby, when lying on her tummy, can lift her head and hold it up by the time she is six weeks old."

If your child could lift her head and hold it up before she was six weeks old, you might think she is much smarter than most babies.

Or, if your child is six weeks old and is not yet able to lift her head and hold it up, you might begin to wonder if she could be "slow" or "cognitively delayed."

Neither of these conclusions may be appropriate. So, we need to explain what we mean by the "typical" baby.

We use the word "typical" to describe the characteristics normally exhibited at a particular stage of development. As you look at your own six-month-old baby, think of all the other six-month-old babies in the world.

By examining large numbers of babies of the same age, researchers are able to identify the characteristics of this age group. And if your child shows these characteristics in one given area of development (for example, recognizes familiar faces), then we can say that your child is "typical" in that given area.

It is important to realize that it is most unlikely that there will ever be a baby who is truly "typical" in every aspect of development.

Usually a baby may be somewhat ahead in some areas, somewhat behind in others, and "typical" in still others.

So, in a very real sense, the "typical" child (that is, "typical" in every single aspect of development) doesn't really exist. Yet the concept of the "typical" child is a useful one to describe the characteristics one would expect to find at a certain age.

For example, when we say that "the typical six-week-old child can lift her head and hold it up," we mean simply that if we looked at a large number of six-week-old babies, we would find that a majority of them had mastered this skill while some others had not.

Conscientious parents want to know what is reasonable to expect in terms of their child's behavior or development.

For that purpose, the concept of the "typical" child is useful, since it provides a research-based means of comparison. However, our efforts to identify the characteristics typically found in children at a given age in no way implies that the child who is "slightly ahead" or "slightly behind" is either a "genius" or "cognitively delayed."

Human growth and development is not a process that takes place with clockwork regularity. Children simply do not grow and develop by the calendar.

Although children generally progress through the same stages, each child develops in her own way and at different rates at different times in her life.

For instance, no two children grow in height at the same rate. Nor does any child grow at a constant steady rate. She may grow two inches one year, four inches the next year, and only one inch the year after. Yet her growth might still be "typical" for a child of her age.

So, "typical" or "normal" covers a wide range of differences—in the age at which a baby lifts her head and holds it up, as well as the rate at which she grows in height.

The "typical" baby's rate of development is described somewhat roughly in terms of certain developmental milestones. These milestones help us to identify specific abilities which mark important stages of learning: Lifting and holding the head up, sitting unsupported, creeping, standing alone, walking alone, first word, first sentence.

There is a normal range of time within which 60 to 70 percent of all children reach each of these milestones. This normal range of time will vary from one ability to another. That is, for some abilities, the range of time will be shorter; for others it will be longer.

The normal range includes a period of time both before and after the age at which our "typical" child reaches a milestone. If a child reaches a given milestone earlier than or within this normal rate, there is no cause for concern.

But a child's failure to reach one of these milestones by the time 75 to 80 percent of all babies her age have passed it is still no reason for the parents to panic.

They should, however, observe her carefully, and call the delay to the attention of her physician. Many problems can be remedied more effectively if they are detected early.

Delay in development is more likely to be cause for concern. Should the child not have reached a milestone which 90 to 95 percent of babies her age have already passed, parents should seek medical help.

Whatever the difficulty, there are many sources of help available. Usually the first of these is your child's physician. ■

Understanding Language

Most professionals believe that children who are spoken to a great deal in early infancy talk better than children of less verbal parents.

One long-term investigation analyzed tape recordings of verbal interactions between parents and infants in their home. Although all the children started to speak at about the same time, their vocabulary as measured by the number of different words used varied significantly, based on the number of words individual children heard in one hour.Later the study found positive correlations between verbal abilities and intellectual development as the children were followed to age nine or ten.

This study matches findings that toddlers and preschoolers who are read to a great deal read more easily and better than those having less experience with language.

A baby's receptive language depends upon his good listening and looking habits in his relationship with parents or other familiar people. Receptive language—that which he understands—always precedes expressive language—that which he can say—by several months. That is, he will understand the word "ball" several months before he tries to say it.

At this age he doesn't understand the exact meanings of words, but he does understand something of what the person using them means since the words are delivered along with feelings, facial expression, gestures and body movement.

For example, when Father says,"Come here," he holds his hands out to receive Baby.

When Mother says, "Give it to me," she reaches out for the object, and when she says, "Here, I'll give it back to you," she hands it back.

Another example is the game where an adult pretends he can't see Baby and says, "Where's Baby, where's Baby?" as he dramatically pantomimes the search for Baby, and finally exclaims, "Here he is!"

Activities like this contribute to the baby's developing capacity to understand language. If you're not already playing such games of language development, try some.

When you play games, talk to Baby, be a ham—put lots of drama into your voice. Make it rise and fall, change from soft to loud, alternate from slow to fast.

Baby is learning to match words with actions, and soon he'll be understanding a lot of these games well. Consider the game of peek-a-boo. To play, cover your face with a towel and encourage Baby to push or pull it off. If he doesn't, peek through the towel to be sure he is looking at you. Remove the cover yourself as you say, "Peek-a-boo."

Remember that while Baby is becoming used to noises, he is still frightened when they are too loud or too sudden, so don't make your "peek-a-boo" explode like a bomb.

There's a bonus from this game which is important for Baby's intellectual development. From peek-a-boo, he'll discover that you are present even though he may not be able to see you. Soon he'll learn that people and objects exist even when they're not immediately visible. ■

What is Baby Saying?

Early sound production is largely a motor function, and like other motor abilities, its development follows a definite order. For example, most of the first sounds are formed in the back of the mouth. Once Baby starts to use his tongue and lips (and later his teeth), he is able to expand his vocabulary by using the front of his mouth.

By six months, Baby has a good many sound combinations, the result of his ability to blend about twelve consonants with a variety of vowels. He can also vary their loudness, duration and pitch.

There is experimental evidence to indicate that rewarding an infant for sound-making—by smiling, hugging, kissing or stroking his stomach—produces an increase in the amount of babbling.

In one comparison between infants under six months living in an orphanage and those living with a family, it was observed that the orphanage infants were slower in the number and types of sounds they produced and the variety of pitch.

Now is the time to use dialog activities regularly. After a pause in his babbling, imitate what he has "said." Continue to repeat what he's said each time he pauses.

Baby may also be talking for the pleasure of hearing his own voice and will smile politely when you respond but won't engage in dialogue.

Remember that while Baby's responses may not exactly resemble what he heard, he is stimulated to make his own sounds. Have you tried tongue clicking, making raspberries with your lips, winking, or saying "buzz?" When he exhibits amusement, be sure to laugh and smile in turn. And pause long enough to permit a vocal response. With practice, you will observe how much the length of the dialogue increases, and how serious baby can become.

On the other hand, don't be disappointed if the imitation or dialogue game doesn't always succeed. There are many occasions when Baby cannot do too many things at one time.

If you catch him babbling while he is playing with a toy, or if you choose to engage him in play with an object, he will be too absorbed in you and the toy to initiate any "back talk." For imitation to contribute to Baby's language learning, you must imitate him. Then he will imitate you. ■

continued from page 37

in his arm and a larger sense of movement than just the action of his hand could provide.

This pleasant new experience was rewarding enough to cause him to continue the shaking, repeating the movements until he was tired, or something distracted him. Thus, what he learned about the sight and feel of an object and the movements of shaking it stayed with him until he was given a new object.

Then, when he felt this new object in his hand, he automatically shook it. Shaking thus became a kind of standard action when Baby had an object in his hand.

The same thing probably happened with banging. The object he was shaking happened to strike a surface, and Baby heard the sound and felt the bump. So, once he made the contact and heard the noise, he would repeat the action again and again.

The point is that at first there is no clear idea in Baby's mind about what he really wants to do with an object. There is no real intention of doing something (like banging it) before it gets into his hand, and there is only a fuzzy connection between his efforts and the effect they produce.

If you try picking Baby up while he is banging something on the high chair tray, chances are his movements will stop completely once he has lost contact with the tray.

There was not really a thought-out strategy for making a sound. When you broke the cycle he was repeating, he stopped. He did not try to reach down to continue making contact with the tray.

Soon Baby's experience with objects will show him that he cannot use the same action on everything.

Table legs, for instance, can be grasped but they cannot be shaken or banged. Therefore, he will develop a wider variety of activities with different objects. This will help him learn to tell the difference between them.

Along with improved control of his movements, his different responses to different objects may include patting the furniture, turning up the corner of the throw rug, or carefully grasping carpet pile. You may find it interesting to keep track of the number of ways Baby can manipulate objects.

Does he use his thumb and fingers to pick up a toy without using his palm? How many fingers? Does he turn his wrist back and forth as he explores a toy? Has he found his feet yet? If he hasn't, he will find them soon. Don't be surprised when he grasps a foot and tries to put it in his mouth.

You will be amazed at how quickly new actions appear. He is indeed learning many things in a short time. During the early stages of exploration, the ordinary household things such as plastic cups or jar lids will provide plenty of experience and stimulation.

Later it will be appropriate to give Baby some additional objects to increase the number of building blocks of experience that will be his stock in trade when it comes to thinking and solving problems. ■

Growing Child®
P. O. Box 2505 • W Lafayette, IN 47996
(800) 927-7289

www.GrowingChild.com

Contributing Authors

Starting Baby on the Road to Discovery

What an exciting time for Baby! Each day is filled with fascinating new discoveries.

She's becoming more alert and aware of her surroundings and anxious to become an active participant in your world.

Because the right experiences at this formative age will help enhance a child's development, toys and books take on a new importance during the upcoming months.

Baby seems to be grabbing the world with her eyes, and her hands. Toys and playthings she can touch, squeeze, grasp, pull, push and handle will help stimulate learning and satisfy her need to manipulate.

Books should play an important role in a child's life, right from the start. Reading to Baby helps foster a bond between you and your child.

An introduction to books at an early age helps language development and encourages a sense of communication, inspiring your growing child to want to learn.

Board books are ideal first books for Baby. They're sturdy, safe and offer simple first stories perfect for introducing children to the pleasures of reading.

You can make good use of your local library's children's section to see what books are available and those that are most attractive to your child. Children's libraries provide an interesting variety and selection.

You can build your youngster's personal library with a book or two at a time—and create a library to be added to as she grows, with books that will be treasured for a lifetime. ■