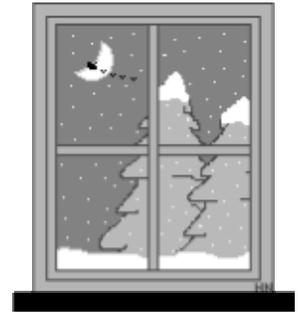


WISCONSIN TWIN RESEARCH NEWSLETTER



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Sign Language for Infants

--By Joseph Martin & Megan Reller

Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development predicted that children aren't capable of language until around 18 months of age. However, recent developments in the use of simplified sign language have shown that infants are capable of signing as early as 8 or 9 months. A longitudinal study on infant sign language has recently begun at Ohio State University by Dr. Kimberly Whaley. Her pilot study suggests that infants as early as 9 months can begin to learn American Sign Language (ASL). Further, hearing-impaired children learn words in ASL earlier, on average, than hearing children learn words in spoken languages. In a study by Folven and Bonvillian in 1991, hearing-impaired children produced their first visible word in ASL around 8.2 months of age.

Results like these have parents around the country beginning to use Baby Sign, a simplified form of sign language created from simple gestures (not a form of ASL), to communicate with their babies very early on. It usually takes several weeks or months of signing by the parents before infants will initiate a sign on their own, without a parent or caretaker first signing to them. Therefore, it's important to be patient, to avoid unwanted stress for both of you. One way to accomplish this is to use only a few signs to represent the child's basic needs (for example: Mom, Dad, sleep, milk, and "all done"). It's also important for everyone in the child's life to consistently use the same signs.

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Keeping Kids Fit: A Mission for Families

--By Nicole and Cory Schmidt

Poor diet and inactivity are among the greatest identifiable killers among adults in the United States today. In addition, current studies indicate that in the last 20 years the prevalence of overweight children has increased.

The key to addressing this concern is to encourage healthy lifestyle choices from birth. Programs to increase regular physical activity in youths hold promise in reducing adult cardiovascular diseases. Positive long-term lifestyle changes need to be established early.

Here are some ways you can incorporate fitness into your children's life:

Toddlers (18 months - 3 years of age):

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that structured infant exercise programs not be promoted because infants do not have the strength or reflexes to protect themselves from injury. Parents may inadvertently exceed the infant's physical limitations by using structured programs.

Instead, families are encouraged to provide opportunities for touching, holding, and face-to-face contact in a warm, minimally-structured play environment for their infant. This age group enjoys rhythmic activities, group games that promote socialization, and lots of exploration.

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Preschool (3 - 5 years of age):

Most preschool children are inherently active and have a strong drive for motor activity. Motor activity is the way that preschoolers explore their environment, achieve physical closeness, and communicate with others. Thus, it is an essential component for their physical and cognitive development.

1. Development:

During the preschool years, motor skills are best learned in an unstructured, noncompetitive setting in which a child can experiment and learn by trial and error on an individual basis. Specific skills such as throwing, hopping, jumping, and catching appear and improve with practice only at certain levels of motor development for the child.

In other words, “sports readiness” occurs at different rates for individual children and is best determined by the child’s eagerness to participate, and by their enjoyment of the activity. A reasonable session would consist of no longer than 15-20 minutes of structured activity, combined with 30 minutes for free play.

2. Appropriate environment:

Equipment and rules can be modified to suit the specific developmental level and attention span of the children. Examples: changes in the size of balls, smaller fields, shorter duration of games and practices, and not keeping score. Competition offers no advantage and should be minimized.

Rather, the focus should be on varied movement experiences. Factors such as fun, success, variety, freedom, family participation, peer support, and enthusiastic leadership encourage participation, whereas others such as failure, embarrassment, competition, boredom, regimentation, and injuries discourage participation.

Structured exercise sessions should be supervised by adults who are knowledgeable about the specific needs and limitations of the preschool age group.

5 - 12 years of age:

Children in this age group can enjoy tumbling, soccer, basketball, and group games in a fun and non-competitive environment. There should be emphasis on aerobic games, group cooperation, fun, and team-building skills. At home, parents can include discussions about being a health-minded consumer.

American Academy of Pediatrics Recommendations for Physical Fitness:

1. All children should participate regularly in a form of physical activity appropriate for their development level and physical health status.
2. Emphasis should be placed on physical activity as a **lifelong** activity of healthy living. Goals of accelerating motor development to maximize subsequent sports ability are inappropriate and should be discouraged.
3. Free play is preferable to structured sessions.
4. Readiness to participate in organized sports is determined individually, based on the child’s (not the parent’s) eagerness to participate, and enjoyment of the activity. Children are unlikely to be ready before the age of 6.
5. In structured sports programs, emphasize goals of participation and enjoyment rather than competition. The setting, format, rules, and equipment should be modified according to developmental level.
6. Parents and pediatricians should compare children’s physical activity level with time spent in passive activities, such as television watching, and incorporate relevant questions into the medical history during yearly checkups.
7. Family members should serve as **role models**, by participating in regular physical activity programs themselves. Physical activities that parents can do with their children should be encouraged.

Web Sites for your Kids and You!

--By Leela Banerjee

Look out parents and twins! The Internet is expanding daily with new web sites created for children and parents. Here are a few web sites that may be educational and fun for you and your children to explore together:

www.alfy.com

*Geared for children ages 3-9.

*Includes interactive games, stories, crafts. Created by educational professionals.

www.disney.com

*Find Disney movies: old, new, and unreleased.

*Play games and learn with "Mouse House Jr.- A Preschool Place."

www.kidscom.com

*Geared for children ages 4-15.

*A safe, educational, entertaining playground for kids to chat, vote, play games, and share jokes, opinions, stories, and video game tips and tricks.

www.yahooligans.com

*Learn about countries, food, and holidays from around the world.

*Includes categories to browse such as school subjects, arts & entertainment, movies, TV, jokes, and music.

*Curious about Science & Nature? Learn about bugs and animals here!

www.ctw.org

*Sesame Street's homepage.

*Information and games for kids and parents

*Meet the characters of Sesame Street, like Maria, Big Bird, and Elmo.

BadgerLink - for Kids!

www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/dltcl/badgerlink/index.html

*When you get to this comprehensive Wisconsin site, click on the "SITES FOR KIDS" button. Provides links to many sites for or about kids, especially educational ones.

For Parents of Twins!

www.owc.net/~twins/faq.htm

*Great website for parents of twins and multiples.

*Includes frequently asked questions.

*Advice for situations such as separating twins in school, toilet training twins, car travel with multiples.

*Great links to other twin web pages.

www.nomotc.org

* National Organization of Mothers of Twin's Club.

* Has a list of other research studies with twins.

www.nofotc.org

*National Organization of Fathers of Twin's Club.

*Has a link to the twins webring, with websites by parents of twins.

*Chat with parents to share experiences.

DISCLAIMER: These sites are not affiliated with the University of Wisconsin*Madison or the UW Twin Center. The UW and UW-Twin Center assume no responsibility for the accuracy of the information presented at these sites. Furthermore, the opinions represented may not represent those of The UW and UW*Twin Center. Please report any offensive or inappropriate content in any of the linked sites to the UW Twin Center. We will promptly review the site and remove the link from future publications if needed.

Winter Safety....

1. Stayed tuned to weather reports, and especially note when there is freezing rain, temporary melting, or other conditions that cause slippery sidewalks.
2. Not only hats and mittens, but frequent washing of hands (after school, after playing with other kids, and, of course, before eating) can help prevent colds and flu.
3. In case of frostbite:
 - Skin will be cold, numb or tingling, and whiter than the surrounding area.
 - Do not rub the area. Do not apply strong heat or hot water. Do not apply snow.
 - Warm the area with body heat (eg: put child's hand under your armpit), or warm water if more severe.
 - Provide shelter, blankets, warm drinks.
 - Redness and pain will occur as the part thaws.
 - Seek medical attention immediately if severe, or else fingers and toes can be badly damaged.

(Infant Sign Language – from Page 1)

Some skeptics argue that the use of signs will disrupt childrens' acquisition of spoken language. However, Linda Acredolo from the University of California-Davis and Susan Goodwyn of California State-Stanislaus have shown that babies who learned Baby Sign at 11 months out-performed their peers by an average of 12 points on a standard IQ test at 8 years of age.

Although this increase in scores may be due to learning signs, it could also be due to the increased attention the child receives, or a host of other factors. Whether it is the use of signs that helps these children communicate early, or the added attention, teaching infants a form of sign language can be a good tool in understanding babies' wants and needs, and can have a positive impact on infant development.

If you would like more information on infant sign language please visit the following web sites:

www.signwithyourbaby.com

www.parentpals.com

www.deafworldweb.org

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... Winter Fun!

Check out the listings in your area for winter fun, whether it be skating, sledding, skiing, etc. Call or check online for schedules from city, county, or state parks and recreational agencies. In addition local, community, and school groups might also offer events, or lessons.

Too chilly? Check out the indoor programs that many of these agencies offer. One good possibility is a nearby library or community recreation center.

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