



PARENT LEADERSHIP:

Turning Love into Empathy

“The key to successful parenting is...based on your deepest feelings of love and affection for your child, and is demonstrated simply through empathy and understanding. Good parenting begins in your heart, and then continues on a moment-to-moment basis by engaging your children when feelings run high, when they are sad, angry, or scared.” —John Gottman, *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child*

In the *A Chat with Your Baby* DVD, your baby told you that she trusts you more than anyone. Your interactions with your baby help her learn how the world works, and how problems should be approached. This extends to learning empathy, too.

John Gottman, in his book *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child*, defines empathy as *“the ability to put yourself in [another person’s] shoes and respond accordingly.”*¹ When you take the time to see things from your child’s point of view, it’s easier to understand why something upsets your child, and you’re better able to have compassion for him. It also gives you insight into how to help your child get through his challenges, because you are able to bring your experience to bear on the situation as you comfort him and help him to know that you are there for him.

So why do babies need empathy? Six-month-olds don’t have big adult-sized problems to overcome in their daily lives. They are concerned with trying to get food in their mouths or how to get those strange appendages they’ve got to move together so they can move around and see something new.


These are automatic things to us, but they are monumental tasks for babies. While your baby is still too little to understand a lot of what you say, babies do understand touch and comfort. Setting up patterns of feeling empathy now can help you to better empathize with your child’s emotions and concerns as she grows older.

For example, if your baby is starting to crawl and gets stuck, or finds himself faced with an obstacle he can’t get over, it’s very frustrating, and your baby may start to cry. You could let the baby try to figure out how to get unstuck, or merely move your baby somewhere else so the obstacle is no longer a problem. Those aren’t necessarily bad solutions.

But if you want to begin to feel empathy with your child early, teach her about emotions and how to constructively deal with them. For example, you might pick up your child, soothe her with cuddles, and talk about how it must be so frustrating when things get in the way or when she gets stuck during important exploring time as you help your baby navigate the obstacle or move her to a clear area where she can move about freely.

Your baby won’t understand what you are saying, but it gives you practice in seeing things from his point of view—which will be valuable as he grows older and his problems become more complicated. It also gives you a chance to reassure him with your touch as you help him overcome the obstacle.

Though early emotional outbursts are usually over seemingly small problems, learning to get through them with empathy from Mom and Dad is crucial. As John Gottman points out, *“Empathy not only matters; it is the foundation of effective parenting.”*²

Empathy for our children allows us to take our love from a feeling to an active principle in raising good children. 

1. Gottman, John. *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998.

2. Ibid.



PARENT CHIT CHAT:

Three Common Issues in Parenting a Six-Month-Old

I. When Should You Start Solid Foods?

Feeding children is often a very charged topic, with many contradictory recommendations. Some experts say to start solids as early as four months, others encourage waiting until seven or eight months, and still others say to start anywhere in between. It's enough to frustrate even the most patient parent.

But don't despair--you don't need to start feeding your child solid foods at a particular, arbitrary age. Instead, as Ellyn Satter, a registered dietician and internationally recognized authority on eating, explains, there are specific signs of readiness you can look for.

According to Satter, "You'll know the time is right when your baby can play an active part in feeding. He'll be able to do that when he can

- Sit up, alone or with support
- Use the muscles in his neck to hold his head up straight
- Mouth his fingers and his toys
- Open his mouth when he sees something coming
- Turn his head away if he doesn't want it
- Stay opened up if he *does* want it
- Keep his tongue flat and low so you can put in the spoon
- Close his lips over the spoon
- Scrape food from the spoon with his lips
- Keep the food in his mouth rather than squeezing it back out onto his chin."¹

During the first year of life, a baby gets the majority of her nutritional needs met through either breastmilk or formula, so don't stress out if your baby takes a bit longer to be ready for solid foods, or if she will

eat little tastes, but not the whole amount you've offered. After all, as Satter points out, "Solids-feeding is supposed to be fun."²

She recommends the following to help your baby be a good eater and have fun with feeding time:

1. Wait until your child is ready to start solid foods.
2. Emphasize the quality of the feeding, not getting food into your baby.
3. Look for, wait for, and enjoy his ways of letting you know that he wants food.
4. Don't put anything in his mouth without his permission.
5. Let him dictate tempo and amounts rather than trying to get him to eat a set amount at a certain rate.
6. Stop feeding when he shows he wants to stop.³

If there is no pressure, then experimenting with solid foods once your baby has shown developmental readiness can be a fun, relaxing time with your child. It becomes an exploration game as your child experiences new tastes and, over time, textures, as she learns how to move food around in her mouth, how to chew and swallow correctly, and as she tries new foods that are offered to her.

II. Getting Baby to Sleep—All Night!

According to a study published in the journal *Pediatrics*, about one in five parents of 6-month-olds have trouble with their child's sleep.⁴ Getting your little one to sleep at night can be exhausting, leaving everyone feeling like a zombie the next morning. It doesn't help that there are so many different techniques touted by all sorts of proclaimed experts. So what's an exhausted parent to do?

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While there is not one miracle soothing technique that will work for every child and family, there are some common recommendations that may help, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics.

- 1. Keep daytime and nighttime different by playing and talking with your baby during the day and being calm and quiet at night.** This is thought to help your baby get used to the difference between night and day.
- 2. Put your baby to bed while she is drowsy, but not yet asleep.** This is thought to help your baby learn to self soothe, because she is used to falling asleep on her own, so perhaps may have an easier time going back to sleep when she wakes up in the night.
- 3. Wait a few minutes before responding to your child's fussing.** If he continues to fuss, check on him, but don't pick him up right away. If he continues to remain unsettled, he may need food or a diaper change, or he may not be feeling well. Teething is also common at this age and can make it difficult for your baby to sleep. Those teeth punching through their gums can hurt!⁵
- 4. Be consistent!** According to Becky Roosevelt, a sleep consultant from Pleasanton, California, who was quoted in a *Wall Street Journal* article, "The best method for any family is the one they can follow consistently."⁶

It can also be helpful to remember that "sleeping through the night" can be a bit of a misnomer. Everyone, even adults, naturally cycles through different sleep phases, including waking up. But sometimes it takes time to learn to self soothe and go smoothly back to sleep.

III. Avoiding Mommy Burnout

"Self-care isn't selfish. You cannot serve from an empty vessel."

Eleanor Brown, noted educator and public speaker

Modern life seems to scream along at a breakneck pace. There is always something to do and somewhere to be, and as the parent of a six-month-old, someone who needs your time and attention. All this frenetic activity can be exhausting. Then you throw in the pressure to "have it all," fueled by the picture-perfect images often portrayed on social media, and it can be a recipe for total mommy burn-out.

Every mom needs a break—whether she is the mother of one child or five, or whether she is a working mom or a stay-at-home mom. Motherhood shouldn't be a burden—it should be a joy! But in order to find the joy of motherhood, you need to take care of yourself, too. So often, women feel "selfish" if they admit to needing a break, or they worry they aren't a good mother if they don't completely focus on their children 100 percent of the time.

However, as Karmel Larson, the founder and CEO of Momni, a "global network of mothers" who share childcare with other mothers around them, says "You lose yourself in motherhood. It's a beautiful, good,

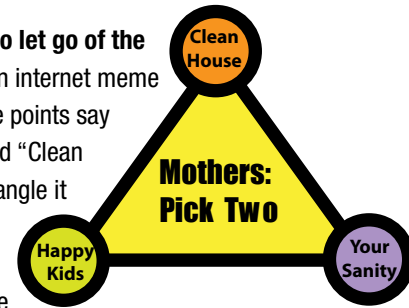
purposeful thing. But, it is also a good thing to make a space for who you are as a woman and as you allow yourself to shine and develop in whatever capacity, that blesses your family as a whole. That doesn't detract from your mothering or child-rearing capacities, it makes you a better mother."⁷

So how can moms avoid burn-out?

Here are several ideas to consider:


- 1. Give yourself permission to let go of the idea of perfection.**⁸ There is an internet meme

that shows a triangle. The three points say "Your Sanity," "Happy Kids," and "Clean House." In the middle of the triangle it says "Pick two." And often this is true! You may have days when you can do it all, but there are going to be lots of days where you just can't, and that is both normal, and okay. Letting go of the idea of perfection can help you to be happy with who you are as you acknowledge that you are doing your best.⁹



- 2. Take time with your partner.**¹⁰ Reconnect with your spouse, and talk about things you enjoy together. This can be after your child's bedtime at home, or you might get a babysitter, even if it is only for an hour.
- 3. Take turns having "me-time" with your spouse,** or, if you are single, perhaps ask a close friend or family member to watch your little one for a while so you can have time to re-charge.¹¹ Having a support network to take on the baby care for a little while so that you can get a break is so vital. You need to take time for yourself so you can have the mental, emotional, and physical reserves to give your baby the care he needs.
- 4. Pick up a new hobby.**¹² Learning something new can help your brain and heart feel refreshed as you participate in an activity that is just for you, that stretches your skills and helps you unwind.

Taking time for self-care means that you are better able to come back refreshed and ready to engage in a loving way with your child.

A win-win for everyone! 

1. Satter, Ellyn. *Child of Mine: Feeding with Love and Good Sense*. Bull Pub., 2000.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Gradisar, M., et al. "Behavioral Interventions for Infant Sleep Problems: A Randomized Controlled Trial." *Pediatrics*, vol. 137, no. 6, 2016, doi:10.1542/peds.2015-1486.
5. <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/baby/sleep/Pages/Getting-Your-Baby-to-Sleep.aspx>
6. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-coaches-parents-call-when-the-baby-wont-sleep-1535463081>
7. <https://www.deseretnews.com/article/900028730/utah-mom-launches-child-care-sharing-network-for-moms-needing-relief.html>
8. <https://www.cnn.com/2017/05/09/health/parenting-burnout-professional-burnout/index.html>
9. Ibid.
10. https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/on-parenting/in-defense-of-a-parents-day-off/2017/01/23/270ffa-c-d8f2-11e6-b8b2-cb5164beba6b_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.8d099c0d46b6
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.




FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS Positive Thinking

Jane Doe walked into the front room. She'd asked her husband to take out the trash on his way out the door, but there it was – still right next to the door. She could start muttering angrily to herself. "What a thoughtless jerk! Why do I have to ask over and over again? Can't he just spend the one extra second to take the trash out as he leaves?"

Or, she could reframe her thoughts in a more positive light. "Wow, he must have really been in a hurry this morning. I bet he was so focused on getting out the door in time that he didn't even see the trash there. I hope his day gets better."

Either way, the trash is still there, but in the second example, Jane ends up much happier. The way we think and communicate shapes our behavior and the environment we live in. When we think about and communicate with those around us with love, everyone ends up feeling safer and more likely to share feelings and experiences with each other. It's easy to blame each other, pass judgment on other people's behavior, and shame others for their incorrect actions. But this anger doesn't improve the offending party's behavior, and it doesn't really make us feel better, either.

Think of a time when you've made a mistake. Which reaction would you rather receive? Sympathy and commiseration, or harsh words pointing out each infraction you are responsible for? It's not always easy, especially in the heat of the moment, but consciously reframing your thoughts and words into a more positive spin can take the anger out of the situation and help everyone grow closer.

In her book, *Anger: The Misunderstood Emotion*, Carol Tavris said, "*Most of the time, expressing anger makes people angrier, solidifies an angry attitude, and establishes a hostile habit.*"¹ When we instead take the time to calm down and make an effort to empathize with the other person, or try to understand the other person, we can often find ways to discuss concerns without putting the offender on the defensive—and we can more clearly see when we need to be the one to make a change in our position or outlook. This works whether you are dealing with your spouse or with a misbehaving child. 

1. Tavris, Carol. *Anger: The Misunderstood Emotion*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989.

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LOOK FOR THESE
EXCITING FEATURES
AND ARTICLES**

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BABY CHATTER
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Be Dependable
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**Take Time To Smell
The Roses**

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