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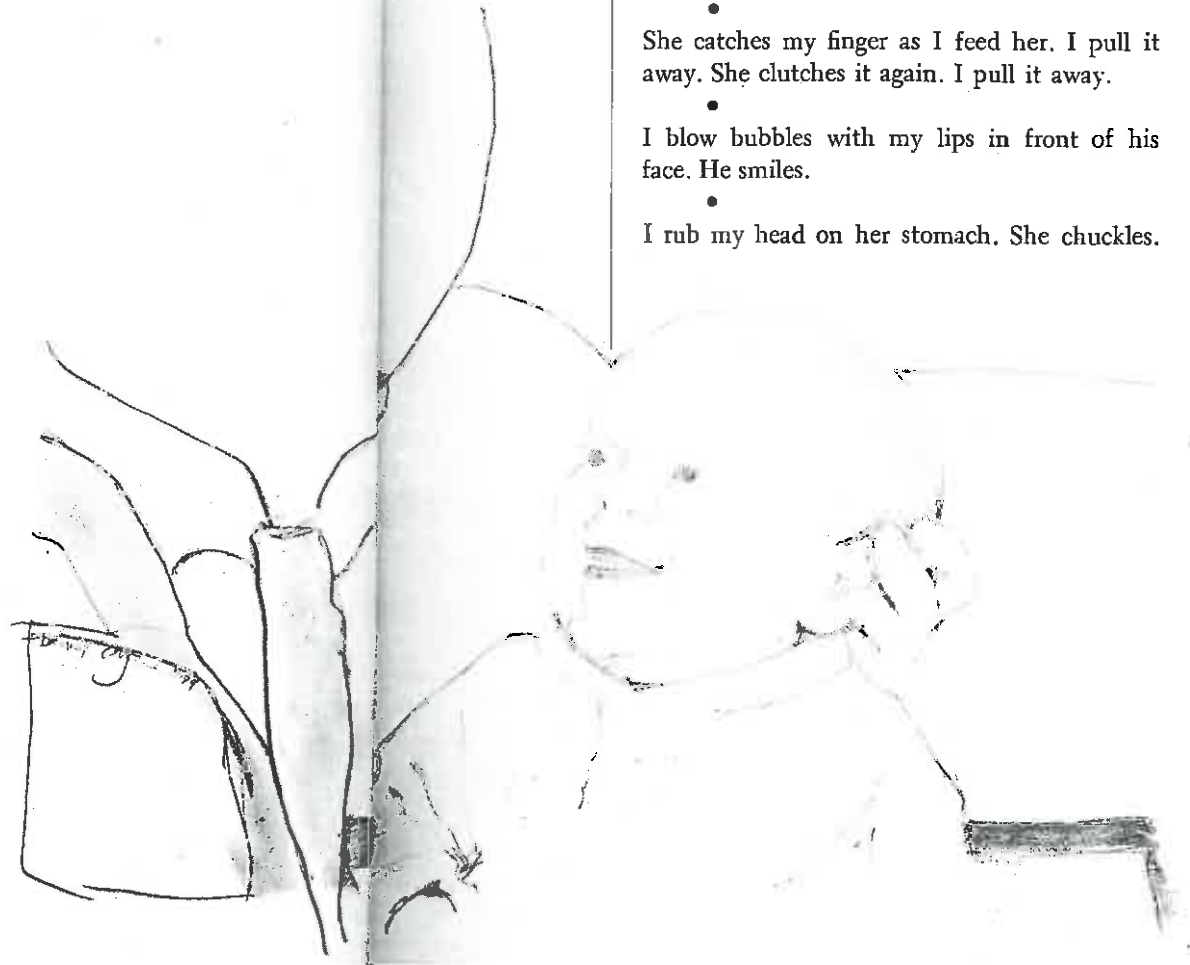
On Being A Clown: *From Birth to Three Months*

They smile delightedly at their mobiles turning quietly above their heads.

•
She catches my finger as I feed her. I pull it away. She clutches it again. I pull it away.

•
I blow bubbles with my lips in front of his face. He smiles.

•
I rub my head on her stomach. She chuckles.



So your first enjoyment will be just the enjoyment of feeding, cuddling, holding, and even the special pleasures of smelling the baby's fresh skin and touching his or her fuzzy head of hair. You begin to discover to what sort of individual you have given birth and to adapt your holding and feeding habits to the baby's needs and temperament. He may be strong and vigorous or mildly active or quiet. He may be irritable or rather easy to live with.

One should not expect early returns. Actually, the baby cannot do much that is visible to us as yet. Although babies are complex systems, they cannot respond very well to us. They have only a few minutes after feeding and before sleeping when they are really alert to the world about them. They stare alertly at large objects, especially bright ones. They take hold of anything we put in their hands to grasp. They may hold their heads up a little, while on their stomachs or backs. But their necks are still very weak and their heads flop over when we are holding them, so they must be cradled in our hand. Their arms wave about fairly wildly when they are not held. But they notice sounds and their directions. They are soothed by rhythmic sounds or movements. They are sensitive to the way they are held, and they can distinguish strong tastes, smells, heat, and cold. In fact, the more we learn about newborn babies, the more we discover what they can already do.

There can be no getting in touch without a lot of care first, however, meaning a lot of cuddling and rocking. We put them in the mood for communication by closeness and acting together. Usually repeated sounds, such as snorts, coos, and snuffles, will be quite clear by the third month, if they have been worked at and if the parent has been playing (that is, imitating) when feeling like it.

We are not just imitating gurgles and snuffles. We must know how to *keep in touch*. By three months, if not earlier, we are undoubtedly *talking* to the baby in that very special

Before you can begin to play with babies, you have to get *in touch*. There has to be some communication. This can begin about the end of the second month, when babies begin to become somewhat more alert to those about them.

The basic rule for getting in touch is to *imitate* them whenever you can. When they smack their hips, then you smack yours. When they snort, snuffle, sigh, gurgle, or breathe heavily, you try to make a sound as close to theirs as you possibly can. It is not easy. But put your face about a foot away from theirs and act like a perfect mimic. For those of you who had a childhood full of finger-popping cheeks, raspberries, and loud clacks of your tongue on the roof of your mouth audible throughout the high school auditorium, this will be an interesting challenge. These sounds represent the beginnings of communication.

Eventually a baby will repeat the sound that you have just imitated. By responding to babies in terms of what they can do, you give them a chance to respond to you with what they have. They make noise, you make noise, they repeat the same noise. That is the first human communication. It is also what education is supposed to be about—that is, using what is already there to make something.

Some mothers are able to play imitating games with their babies by the end of the first month—but not many. Many parents are able to establish these close contacts within three months, however. One must remember that a lot of simple caring must go on to provide a basis for closeness. In the first month of life one may be too exhausted by feeding the baby, by being up every night, by getting over childbirth, by being depressed about recovering your figure, or by paying the doctor's bill to worry about games.

get their attention. Even if we did not want to play, we would have to. As long as we want their attention, we must

play.

We have now shown two ways in which you have to be a clown to get in touch and to keep in touch with babies. It might be reassuring for you to know that everyone does it. Better-educated mothers tend to do more of it. Mothers who keep in touch in these ways develop a very good communication with their babies by three months or so. Both mother and baby look at each other and look away from each other at roughly the same time. Mothers and babies who have not paid so much attention to each other tend to have this all messed up. Each one looks when the other is not looking. It is like unrequited love. I am sure we all know a lot of people who do not seem to know when to look and when not to look, even when to gurggle and when not to gurggle. Anyway, this is where it all begins.

GAMES AND OTHER THINGS TO DO

But now let us return to games. We have been dealing with ways to play-communicate with babies and how to continue this activity by being a clown.

The Game of Gurgle

We have already told you about this game, but now we want to make it formal. There are two stages: First stage: one-month-old baby makes back of throat gurgles; parent, leaning close to baby's face, repeats same sound; baby smiles. Second stage: Two-month-old baby gurgles; parent gurgles; baby repeats own gurgle. Now you are in touch and have the basic elements in a

way that parents have. Most parents do not like to be told that they do these things. But there are now records on film, taken by Dr. Daniel Stern, of New York, and we know that practically any good parent does it.

Parents talk to their babies and *keep in touch by elongating their vowels*: "Hi sweee-e-e-t-e-e. Hi-i-i-i-i. Are ya loo-o-o-kin' at Moo-o-meec?" The range of pitch is increased, especially at the high end. (Imagine the above statement in a high squeaky voice.) Speech is slowed down or stretched out. (The hyphens above suggest the process here.)

Their faces assume mock exaggerated expressions. There are raised eyebrows and wide-open eyes, like the made-up faces of clowns themselves or like the clownlike pictures of faces that hold the attention of young infants in the experiments on what babies will look at in the first six months of life. The mouth is also open and pursed in saying "Ooo-ooo." The head comes up and forward to within inches of the baby's face.

Parents gaze into the infant's eyes for a long time. Sometimes they look at each other for more than thirty seconds, which is an unusually long period of time for adults unless they are in love. Usually this is a one-sided conversation, with the parent doing all the talking and most of the looking, but combined with all the other points above, it seems to be what keeps the baby looking at the parent. We should mention too that at two to three months babies gaze at their mothers with complete and total rapture, which we call *eye-love*. Eye-love is beautiful to see, and it is the second form of human rapture. The first form is having a nice warm stomach full of milk.

So we imitate babies to get in touch, and we speak in this odd way to keep in touch. If we don't, they cease to pay attention to us and look somewhere else. The amusing thing is that babies really force us into this behavior. If we do not do it, they will ignore us. We are forced into continually doing something novel, either making faces or sounds, in order to

game, which is two people working together to produce something. But notice, there is always an uncertainty about what will happen. Will you get a gurgle or not? Now clearly babies do not know that they are playing a game in this sense. They only know that they are enjoying themselves. Most of the games that parents play with children are like that. They are sort of one-sided, *except* that both have fun. Also, the baby is being hooked into the system of turn-taking, without which no game (nor for that matter most social life) is possible.

At this early stage there is also something very important to say about *not* playing games. You must always begin those activities that are clearly games quietly and gently. Some babies simply may not want the stimulation yet, or perhaps not at the time you are trying, and they use their one technique for controlling you. They turn away either their head or their eyes. Other babies are more ready, and they respond. You must adjust your energy and pace to the babies' responses.

The Game of Diaper Push

By the second month babies begin to respond to you. When you lift them, they pull with their arms. In the bath they kick the water. They more regularly put new things in their mouths. They turn their heads and eyes toward moving people and blink when people come toward them. Their eyes follow a moving person, although often in a jerky way, like a camera having to refocus at each fixing.

The game of diaper push emerges while you are changing the baby's diaper for the umpteenth time. Lean over the baby and let her push her feet into your stomach. She tends to push harder against you. When pushed, you leap back with the push, crying "Aagh," or whatever your favorite whoop is,

but not too loudly. Then push forward on the legs again. She

On Being a Clown

The game is actually begun in a milder way than suggested here. First you press very gently down on the baby's feet with your stomach. Then, as you are pushed back, you move backward and then forward again until the infant seems to notice the action and reaction and begins to smile as it is repeated. As the game develops, you can add the antics of leaping backward, and so forth, always remembering that continuing and extending the intensity of a game depends on whether the infant is indeed interested. Fortunately, at this stage there is not much you can do about infants' turning off. It seems to be one of their best defenses against too much stimulation. If they can't use your input, they turn away.

We should add that diapering has become a favorite occasion to move and smile. It is as if this were the first playground, although some authorities feel that the baby's playing with his mother's finger as she feeds him is the first playground. Anyway, diapering is certainly a popular time for play. There are many play activities that can take place while diapering, including gently and rhythmically slapping their little bottoms, tickling their tummies, and playing bicycles with their feet in your hands. Babies' bare nether regions are always inviting.

The Game of Poking Out the Tongue

Toward the end of the second month, but certainly into the third, you are both poking your tongue out at each other (if you've been working at it). There are little smiles of recognition coming your way. We do not agree with those people who say that she will be sticking her tongue out at people for the rest of her life. The evidence suggests that

nothing continues throughout life that does not continue to get rewarded, and we are not going to go on rewarding her for this—at least not when we get into some more-sophisticated games.

Dancing

Dancing is not really a game because there is not meant to be any uncertainty, and games are not games without uncertainty. However, because most people are poor dancers and poor coordinators, there often is an uncertainty even in dancing. We put dancing here because it is a part of playfulness with children. It is a great deal of fun to dance around holding a little baby in your arms. Jiggle his arm up and down to the music and in time with the rhythm. When you stop or the music stops, he keeps his arm going up and down. It is better to call dancing a *ritual*, because it brings people together. That's what rituals are, activities that bring different people together; for in dancing we are united.

If you have a large family, then the music sessions around the guitar, the hi fi, or the TV music show can be even more unifying for all family members. Even a small baby seems to feel the excitement of everyone dancing.

There are some social groups where babies are always carried on their mothers' backs and therefore always moving in accord or in unison with their mothers. Because of this the babies show remarkably rapid physical development. They sit up and walk much earlier than do babies in Western civilization, walking as early as eight months, whereas our average is one year.

Still, we are advocating a little rhythm as a game rather than as a way of life. Some strong mothers might try more dancing if they have the energy for it.

Singing

Like dancing, singing can be either a parent and baby activity or an all-family pastime, or both. It can be with piano, guitar, or just a TV commercial or simple folksong. The melody of the song is what keeps the baby's attention (like "sweeee-e-e-e," mentioned earlier). The baby simply "hangs on the song," watching you eagerly throughout. Our favorite, which we must have sung a thousand times, was a sad old children's game called "Green Gravels," which children used to play in the 1800s. The words follow:

Green gravel, green gravel, the grass is so green.
The fairest young lady that ever was seen.
He sent you a letter to turn around your head,
Oh Mary, Oh Mary, your true love is dead.

The baby was not aware of the morbidity but was attracted, we think, by the simplicity and regularity of the rhythm and melody.

The Game of Biting Parent's Finger

By three months babies have fairly sophisticated mouths, and they can use them only too well. Their eyes now focus on a target quite well. Their neck muscles are stronger, so they can adjust their heads better. There is a great game that you can play from about three to six months, which we call "bitting parent's finger." It hurts! In this game the parent slips a finger in and out of the baby's mouth. You win if you slip it in and out again without being bitten. The baby wins if she bites you.

If you are lucky in this early period, the teeth are not de-

veloped and you only have to deal with stiff hard gums and a powerful suck. This game, like all others, is helped and aided by mock cries from you, exclamations, and huggings, which communicate the importance and enjoyment of the climaxes. Biting parent's finger is like a real game in that it is organized entirely by the coach (the parent) and there is both a winner and a loser.

The Game of Pulling the Hand from the Lion's Mouth

This is another sophisticated *mouth* game. You chew his hand, very carefully of course. He pulls the hand away, and you put it back; or he pushes it into your mouth, and you nibble it. He pulls it out, then pushes it back again—all with much smiling by both of you. We are not sure, though, that we can trust all adults with this game; little babies are pretty succulent.

The Game of Pinky Pulling

While the mouth is playing some tricks, the hands and arms have also been shaping up. By now babies tend to pull or grasp whatever is in their hands. The game of pinky pulling is a later version of finger biting, and much less painful. By the third month babies begin to reach fairly regularly for things they see, usually with a two-armed pincerlike swipe in the object's general direction. So if you hold a finger up in front of the baby's face, she reaches for it and may grasp it. Then you pull somewhat, and she pulls somewhat. After doing this for a bit, you pull away but then give her the opportunity to grab the finger again. The tugging goes on once more, getting the finger free, having it caught, until she loses interest. This is the first game of tug-of-war.

The Game of Bob-White

By three months also babies are turning their heads in the direction of sounds. They are responding to your talking to them with some babbling of their own. That is, they are "making sounds" rather than just expressing feelings of pleasure and pain (the cries and coos of the first two months). The imitative game they seem to like at this time is an advance on the game of gurgle above. It is the lengthening of a low sound and then adding a quick high sound on the end, as does the bird known as a bobwhite. Babies are clearly capable of changing the length of the "Bob" and thus pacing the surprise ending. There is delight in doing this either with you or by themselves.

Mobles: Red and Yellow

We have games for the mouth, for the legs, for the hands, and for sounds. We obviously should have a game for the eyes, but we don't. By three months babies are looking more at faces. They seem to recognize you. They look into your eyes as if they have decided the eyes are the important part of the face to look at. They spend much time watching mobiles if there is one hanging above their crib. If you put one up, it should be quite simple—just one object that turns in the breeze, with perhaps a different color on each side. If there is no breeze, slowly alternate the colors. Red and yellow are interesting to babies, but mobiles are not games.

CAVEATS

Things we could tell you, but you should read about in other, more-sober manuals:

play by himself. Children do mainly what those around them do. If the adults in a child's life do not play, the child will not play much either, and they will all have a dull time together. We should warn you that no matter how much time you put in, it will usually be just a fraction of the baby's free time. It has been shown that babies are on their own while awake, amusing themselves, about 90 percent of the time, and sometimes a great deal more. The mother's total caretaking time is usually less than 10 percent of the baby's waking time.

The manner of play is important to babies just on the basis of time spent. But probably even more than that it is important because that is the only time that the baby (the infant or the child) and the adult are truly free agents. The famous child psychologist Erik Erikson has said that play is what we do with the leeway of experience—that is, with the leftover, free part of experience.

How babies play at first is not easy to observe, but we think that the first examples are *mouth play*. Even in the first months we can observe babies bubbling saliva on their lips and moving their tongues around their mouths. They often seem to be particularly relaxed while doing this. They look as if they are "musing" or "ruminating." We are probably correct in thinking they are at play. That is, they are no longer hungry or uncomfortable. They are no longer trying to discover something or get to something. They are observing what happens when they vary things. They are being versatile with their mouths. Of course this play looks as if it is accompanied by a lot of pleasure. What we may later call the excitement of play, we can at this time call its pleasure.

After mouth play there is *hand play*. The babies hold their hands together or explore their mouths with their forefingers. They are calm and seem to be enjoying themselves, as judged by their coos and their not seeming to want anything in

Wash your hands before playing bite the finger!

Babies are very different. Some just love these arousing games, others have to proceed at a quieter pace.

Mothers are also very different. They have to explore carefully to see if their babies are like them. Maybe they are not. Maybe they are opposite—mother noisy, baby quiet; baby noisy, mother quiet. You have to reach some compromise there.

Fathers are also very different. Some are straight, some are clowns. Some babies love clowns, others do not appreciate them.

Infants are only good for a few minutes of play per day in the first month or so, then they are off to sleep again. You do not have much time to "work" with.

I suppose we could add our personal view that homes are principally for living in. The place for singing and playing and dancing with the baby is in the nicest and warmest part of the house, which is usually the living room. Activities in a house should be centered primarily around fun and only secondarily around appearances.

THE BABY'S OWN PLAY

In order to be playful you also have to be a good observer. Therefore a large part of this book is devoted to telling you what to look for. Our belief is that by watching what babies are doing, you will be able to invent new ideas for what to do with them. After all, during the first year of life almost anything babies do that can be imitated can become a game. Once you start responding to each other, new sounds and new actions creep in.

Whether or not you play with the baby, he will be playing on his own, although the evidence suggests that, other things being equal, the more you play with him, the more he will

By imitating them you can find ways of having fun together. You should continue to play as long as you are *both* having fun, allowing for both the baby's feelings and your energy level. There are games for sounds, for the mouth, for the hands, and for the legs; and the eyes are always active. In most of these games and other activities you are of course the coach. These games lift babies to a higher level than they could otherwise reach. Just compare the complexity of the games that we have mentioned with the simplicity of the babies' own play that we have described. Your social play provides examples for their future. Later in their own play they will reproduce what you have shown them.

We do not know how you have felt about being a clown through all this. You have used a most peculiar voice. You have been gurgling and popping your lips. You have poked out your tongue. You have been leaping in the air, dancing, singing, getting your finger bitten, and making noises like a bird. There might be those who would want to put you away, but the baby would not.

particular. After feeding they run their fingers through the goo of the cereal on and around their lips.

Around the second and third months too there is usually much *sound-making play* (vocal play). They may gurgle with some of the milk in their throats or make throatlike sounds. When we remember that their greatest competence in these first three months is with their mouths, with sucking and swallowing, it is not surprising that this sort of skill is what gets varied in play. At the end of the third month they will probably be talking to themselves, even without others present. There have been research projects to determine whether babies of this age will use their ability to suck to bring a picture into focus. An apparatus equipped with a nipple is used; if it is sucked in certain ways (arranged by the experimenter), the picture, which is projected on a screen before the babies, will be seen clearly. If they do not suck it just right, the picture goes out of focus. The results have shown that they can do this, they can get the picture into focus, which indicates that they are much more alert to the world around them than we would give them credit for.

Once again though we have had to use their skills (in this case, sucking) as a starting point. The good educator, we repeat, is the person who takes what is there and organizes it. The future of baby toys lies in the hands of those inventors who can make use of this principle. One psychologist has, for example, invented a toy that enables a two-month-old baby, by pushing her head harder on her pillow, to make her mobile move. Basically, the pressure on the air in the pillow exerts air pressure on a trigger that moves the mobile, which is in the baby's line of vision. With toys of this sort babies can gain very early a sense of mastery in a world where they are usually thought of as helpless.

Obviously from our examples we think that you can get in touch with babies and that you can keep in touch with them.