

## A Child's Pace Sets Parenting Timing, by Joanne Baum, Ph.D.

There are many small children, who, when they receive encouragement and not pressure, will learn things so easily it looks like they are “independent learners.” Children are born with a natural inquisitiveness, some more than others. A child's inquisitiveness will be greeted by parents in a variety of ways. When your very young child starts pointing at things and saying sounds like “eh,eh” as he points, he is probably asking for an explanation. You have the choice to ignore it since it's a semi-intelligible or you can respond openly and completely explaining what the child is pointing to. When you give explanations happily you are teaching your child that he or she is worth your time and energy. You are also teaching him that his requests for information will be filled.

By the time your child reaches the “why” or “what's that” stage it can be incredibly exciting for you or you can find yourself saying, “that's not important.” Let's look at the response in your child depending upon your reactions to her inquiries. First of all, if you try to tell your child, “enough with the questions,” you'll be discouraging her natural pace of learning. You don't want to do that. Yes the questions can get annoying if you are pre-occupied with adult thoughts and your own agenda, but a child's brain between the ages of one and three is developing at such an incredible rate. The synaptic sequencing your child is developing will last all his life. You want to encourage her brain to be firing thoughts, connections, and ideas.

I've developed a form of parenting I call “respectful parenting.” In it the adult is guided by the child's pace in this world. For instance if you have your young baby out doing errands and she begins to get upset, you try and calm her down. If your attempts

are met with more agitation, and you can't settle her down; rather than "force her" to keep going because you had a set agenda, you take her out of the environment that was upsetting her, into a calmer, quieter environment. If she calms down after leaving the store, you can make an attempt to go back into the store, but if she is again very upset when she is re-introduced to that environment it's time for something else. It's best to remove her from the store if she's hungry, tired, or just needs some cuddling. After filling those needs, you might try her in the store again because she might be refreshed from her full belly or your nurturing and may do better. If not, and if her behavior tells you she's simply at stimulation overload, your baby's needs need to come first.

A baby gets "stimulation overload" easily, and that needs to be respected. When you don't respect your child's natural emotional breaking point, you can be teaching your child not to listen to her own limits. It isn't fair to a baby to push him beyond his comfort zone. His nerves are still raw from being born into this exciting, fast paced, visually stimulating world from that quiet safe womb in which he lived for nine months.

As your child grows there may be other "natural learning sequences" you want him to learn faster than he is ready. For instance, one of the first big power struggles usually arises when a parent decides he's had enough diapers and it's time for his child to learn to use a potty. This can be a set up for many patterns to come. A parent introduces the "potty" fully expecting his child to take to it. And the child doesn't. The child isn't the least bit interested. Old parenting manuals had the child sit on the potty till she was "successful" or at least sit on it for fifteen minutes at a time. Today's child development specialists encourage you to introduce the potty, your child's very own sized one, but not to demand, pressure or cajole. You give an encouraging explanation, you give your child

the choice, and then let it be. It's okay if the potty sits unused. It's okay if there is an initial positive response and then nothing. You can even put it away if he's not interested. If you take your child's potty away, first tell him with a calm neutral voice that you are going to put it away for a while because he's not interested and you can try it again whenever he wants. Try bringing it out and asking him if he thinks he might be ready to use it in a month or six weeks later. If your child is self-motivated in other areas, you can ask your child to tell you when she's ready to try the potty. Now that may sound crazy to some of you, but as your child sees her friends using one, and as she sees other kids at day care using one, she'll get curious. But if you pressure, cajole, and insist, it may very well become your first of many power struggles.

Children are born with their own pace of learning and being in this world. They blossom with relative ease when you respect that pace and encourage it. Your child's pace may vary at different developmental periods in her life. When you are flexible in your parenting expectations you'll be encouraging your child to be more fully who he or she can be. You both learn together who your child is as a separate human being and who you are as a parent and an adult human being. It's a pretty exciting process that unfolds in front of your eyes as you go.

Joanne Baum, PhD, is the author of *Got the Baby Where's the Manual!?!? Respectful Parenting from Birth Through the Terrific Twos*. You can find more information on her website: [www.respectfulparenting.com](http://www.respectfulparenting.com). Or you can call 303-679-1949 or 800 519-6003.