

To submit questions to *Healthy Children*, send an e-mail to healthychildren@aap.org or write to American Academy of Pediatrics
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Ask the Pediatrician

Solving the Riddles of Parenthood

1. Bundle Up

Q: How should I dress my 6-month-old during the winter?

A: Dress infants and children warmly for outdoor activities. Several thin layers will keep them dry and warm. The rule of thumb for older babies and young children is to dress them in one more layer of clothing than an adult would wear in the same conditions.

2. Head-Turning Advice

Q: I put my newborn on his back to sleep, as recommended. Are there steps I can take to prevent a positional skull deformity?

A: Give your baby plenty of "tummy time" when he's awake. This will help strengthen neck muscles and avoid flat spots on his head. Vary his sleeping position by alternating which side you turn his head to each night when you put him to bed. You should do the same at naptime. For example, the first time you put him to sleep, turn his head to the right side. Next time, turn it to the left, and alternate sides thereafter.

You'll also want to limit the amount of time your baby spends in a car seat, unless he's actually riding in a vehicle. The same goes for other types of infant seats, such as swings, carriers, or bouncy seats, where the back or side of your baby's head rests against them.

3. Say No to Bullies

Q: My daughter is in the second grade and recently witnessed a student bullying



one of her classmates. How should I advise her?

A: Bullying is when one child picks on another child repeatedly. Usually children being bullied are either weaker or smaller, shy, and generally feel helpless. Bullying can be physical, verbal, or social. It can happen at school, on the playground, on the school bus, in the neighborhood, or over the Internet.

Since your daughter was a bystander, encourage her to:

- Not cheer on or even quietly watch bullying.
- Tell a trusted adult about the situation.
- Support other children who may be bullied.
- Include these children in activities.
- Join with others in telling bullies to stop.

4. Use Vs. Abuse

Q: Can the stimulant medications prescribed for Attention-Deficit/Hyperactiv-

ity Disorder (ADHD) lead to illegal drug or alcohol abuse?

A: Although your child may need medicines to help him stay in control of his behavior; medicines used to treat ADHD do not lead to drug abuse. In fact, taking medicines as prescribed by your pediatrician and doing better in school may help your child avoid drug use and abuse.

5. A Caution about Coughing

Q: What is whooping cough? How can I protect my children from catching it?

A: Also called pertussis, whooping cough is caused by bacteria in the lungs. It is highly contagious and can spread from person to person through close contact with an infected person who coughs or sneezes. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), communities throughout the United States have had record numbers of outbreaks in recent years.

In children, pertussis involves spasms of coughing that can last for several weeks or months and vomiting. The coughing spasms make it harder to eat, drink, and breathe. It is typically most severe in infants younger than 1 year old. Older children and adults can get it, too, but it is much less severe.

The best way to protect infants is to get them the DTaP (diphtheria, tetanus toxoids, and acellular pertussis) vaccine when they are 2, 4, and 6 months old; 15 to 18 months old; and 4 to 6 years old. DTaP is safe and prevents severe pertussis and death among infants and young children. Parents can also protect their infants by

avoiding persons who have cold symptoms or cough. In older children, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends universal vaccination of adolescents at the 11 to 12 year-age visit, as well as catch-up vaccination of older adolescents to help boost protection. The tetanus toxoid, reduced diphtheria toxoid, and acellular pertussis vaccine (Tdap) replaces the Td (tetanus and reduced diphtheria toxoids) vaccine in the childhood immunization schedule. The Td vaccine is used for future booster doses for adolescents and adults.

6. Well Read

Q: How can I develop a love of reading in my 2-year-old twins?

A: Instilling a love of reading is a gradual process. It helps to start early and encourage your children's interest in reading. The following are some activities to help children ages 1 to 3 learn language and begin to make the connection between words and meaning:

- Allow them to pick which books they want, even if they pick the same one time and time again. The goal is to make it fun! Read to your children every day.
- Let your children "read" to you by naming objects in the book or making up a story.
- Make regular trips to the library. Most children find it very exciting to get a library card. Make this moment something to celebrate.
- Talk, sing, recite rhymes, and play with your children.

7. Potty Politics

Q: How do I know when my son is ready to be potty trained?

A: The right time depends on your son's physical and psychological development. There is no set age at which toilet training should begin. Children younger than 12 months have no control over bladder or bowel movements and little control for six months or so after that. Between 18 and 24 months, children often start to show signs of being ready, but some children may not be ready until 30 months or older:

Look for any of the following signs that your son is ready:

- He stays dry at least two hours at a time during the day or is dry after naps.
- Bowel movements become regular and predictable.
- Facial expressions, posture, straining, hiding, or



words reveal that he is about to urinate or have a bowel movement.

- He can follow simple instructions.
- He can walk to and from the bathroom and help undress.
- He seems uncomfortable with soiled diapers and wants to be changed.
- He asks to use the toilet or potty-chair.
- He asks to wear grown-up underwear:

8. Safe House

Q: How can I protect my child against poisoning? What should I do if she swallows a potentially poisonous substance?

A: The best defense against unintentional poisoning is prevention. Many household products can be poisonous if swallowed, come into contact with the skin or eyes, or are inhaled. Some of the more common hazards include medicines and items such as furniture polish, drain cleaners, weed killers, and gasoline.

Important safety rules include:

- Keep harmful products locked up and out of your child's sight and reach.
- Use safety latches or locks on drawers and cabinets where you keep dangerous items.
- Call medicine by its correct name. Don't confuse the child by calling medicine "candy."
- Replace the safety caps immediately after use.
- Keep products in their original containers.
- Teach children not to drink or eat anything unless an adult that they know gives it to them.
- Flush old medications down the toilet.

If your child swallows a substance that is not food, seek help immediately. Call the Poison Help Line at 1-800-222-1222 or your doctor. Don't make your child vomit. Call 9-1-1 if a child

is having convulsions, stops breathing, or loses consciousness.

9. Net Gains

Q: How can I make sure my children's time on the Internet is safe, productive, and fun?

A: Just like you have rules for how your children should deal with strangers and which TV shows, movies, and videos they are allowed to watch, it is important to have a set of rules when they use the Internet.

- Set limits on the amount of time your children can spend online each day or week. Consider using an alarm clock or timer in case you or your children lose track of time.
- Do not let online activities take the place of homework, playing outside or with friends, and pursuing other interests.
- Make sure your children know that people online are not always who they say they are and that online information is not necessarily private.
- Monitor the Web sites your child visits. Consider purchasing protective software.

10. A Shot of Prevention

Q: Since I am breastfeeding my baby, does she still need immunizations?

A: Yes. While breastfeeding is the best nutrition for your baby, it does not prevent infections the way vaccines do. Your child may have fewer colds, but breastfeeding does not protect against many serious illnesses—such as whooping cough, polio, and diphtheria—like immunizations do. By doing both, you can offer your child a double dose of prevention. ●