

## **Baby Survival Guide**

By Joan Tupponce, Richmond Magazine, April 2005

### *Tips to help new parents survive baby's arrival*

In addition to the excitement, joy, pride and love most new moms and dads feel during their first few weeks of parenthood, the exclamation “Yikes! What do I do now?” probably comes to mind a few thousand times.

Realizing that you are the parent and the responsibility to raise your child rests on your hips, shoulders, knees and hands — all those places that baby finds dear — can be a tad overwhelming at times. But it doesn't have to be.

Over time, friends and family will step in to lend a hand and their advice — lots of advice. You'll read countless books on raising and caring for your baby. You'll talk to other parents. And, you'll read articles like this one that offer tips and suggestions to help you adjust and help your baby thrive.

#### **1. And baby makes three**

The folks at the Commonwealth Parenting Center know that bringing baby home creates new responsibilities, and in the beginning, you may feel overjoyed, apprehensive, excited, frustrated and exhausted — all at the same time. Your relationship with your partner can become unbalanced as you sort out daily routines, sleep schedules and feeding patterns. The Center's “And Baby Makes Three” class will help you sort it all out. You'll get advice like “make a date for time as a couple, to reconnect and nurture your relationship” or “identify which parts of your ‘old life’ you miss and try to add one or two back into your schedule,” says Elizabeth Pearce, executive director. “Making time for your relationship is not a luxury; it's essential.”

*Call 545-1272.*

#### **2. Balance your life with Yoga**

For centuries, people have turned to yoga to balance mind and body. So why not let your baby take advantage of this trusted method of exercise and relaxation. Yoga Source has introduced classes especially for new moms and their babies. The school's Baby and Me class is a gentle yoga class for post-partum moms who want to regain their abdominal strength and flexibility. Moms can bring their babies — up to 6 months old — along to class. Some exercises even involve the baby. The school's Itsy Bitsy Yoga class focuses on newborns to pre-crawling infants and pre-crawling infants to 24-month-olds. “The babies follow a specific routine of interaction exercises,” says Lynn Brooke, co-owner. “We also teach baby-massage techniques. All of this helps facilitate development for the infant and create a relationship between mom and child.” It helps create a sense of community for new moms. “They love the way they feel and they love the interaction,” Brooke says. “Moms get to meet other moms.”

*For more information on Yoga Source, call 359-9642. You can also call Glenmore Yoga & Wellness Center at 741-5267.*

#### **3. Playful learning**

“For infants and toddlers, play is the primary method for learning,” says Kristin Stemhagen, director of public relations for Children's Hospital of Richmond. “All infant activities and positive interactions can be considered play, and anywhere a young child spends time — from the bassinet to the car seat — is a learning and play environment.” The staff at Children's Hospital tells parents that for the first seven months, children learn from looking, listening and touching. Parents can promote learning by encouraging infants to spend time playing on the floor (“tummy time”); putting toys in front of a child so they touch them and interact; talking to infants while playing or performing everyday activities; sitting face to face with an infant as much as possible to provide eye contact; and imitating sounds the baby makes to reinforce

sounds. For example, when your baby babbles “mamamama,” say, “That’s right, I am your mama.”

Call 321-7474.

#### **4. Get out of the kitchen**

The first few weeks after bringing baby home are hectic for most moms. The last thing they want to do is cook a family meal. The solution: Have a prepared meal delivered to your home. According to Chef Maura, friends of new moms will give a week of meals as a gift. “It’s something they can use to help them out,” she explains. “They just call me to schedule delivery.” Chef Maura has two dining options: a Chef’s Choice menu (Tuesdays with Maura) — a total of 10 meals delivered on Tuesdays or the Low-Carb Thursdays option, where each meal has less than 20 net grams of carbs. “All of our meals are delivered at one time, either Tuesday or Thursday,” explains Chef Maura. “Everything will stay good for a week. Most everything is freezable.”

*For more information about Chef Maura, call 740-7654 or visit [www.chefmaura.com](http://www.chefmaura.com).*

#### **5. Pets and babies**

Bringing a baby home to a household with pets is an adjustment for everyone. “Babies come with different smells and sounds,” explains Sarah Babcock, director of education and training at the Richmond SPCA. “They have different routines.” Parents-to-be want to introduce their dog to those smells, sounds and routines before the baby arrives. “You want to think about all the things that will happen and incorporate them into the dog’s routine,” Babcock says. “For example, if the dog won’t be allowed in the baby’s room, start training the dog before the baby comes home. You don’t want everything to change when the baby does come home.”

When that day arrives, handle the introductions slowly and carefully. “You don’t want to leave the baby and your dog together unattended for quite some time,” Babcock says. Also, think about your tone of voice. That can affect how the dog feels about having the baby in the house. “If you say ‘No, no get down’ to the dog, the dog might start to think that he doesn’t like this intruder,” Babcock says. “You want your tone of voice to be happy.” Also, spend time with your dog so he doesn’t feel left out, and create a safety zone for the dog where he can get away from the commotion. “Think about where the dog will be during the baby’s routine and train him to go there,” Babcock says.

#### **6. Massage the cares away**

According to Linda Brauer, program director for Commonwealth Parenting Center, infant massage, practiced by many cultures for centuries, has grown in popularity since its introduction to the United States in the 1970s. Infant massage is relaxing for your baby and often results in sounder and longer sleep. “Physical benefits include relief for fussy babies, aid to digestion and improved circulation,” Brauer says. “Studies have shown that premature babies experience increased weight gain.” Infant massage also has benefits for moms and dads which include a parent-baby bonding that communicates love, well-being, and a feeling of safety and protection through the sense of touch.

Jenny Simpson, certified infant-massage instructor at Glenmore Yoga & Wellness Center, has been teaching infant massage for 10 years. She explains that her comprehensive five-week class teaches parents “a skill for life. Babies that are massaged are calmer. They get used to communication through touch. By the time the baby is a toddler, the concept of calming is something he is familiar with and can tap into.” Mothers also benefit. “It’s proven to help mothers who are depressed; it’s calming for them as well,” Simpson says.

*For more information, call the Commonwealth Parenting Center at 545-1272 or Glenmore Yoga & Wellness Center, at 741-5267.*

#### **7. From head to toe and then some**

For some, new babies can be expensive. Consignment shops can help you slice off some of the expense. The Hall Tree, for example, carries clothing for men and women, but also for moms-to-be and children, including infants and sometimes preemies. “People get so many baby clothes that we get quite a few

items that haven't been worn at all," says owner Joan Williams. "By shopping in a consignment store, you get clothes at a wonderful price and you have more clothes for the same amount of money you would spend in a [retail store]." Because their source supply is always expanding, The Hall Tree carries outfits from a variety of stores in Richmond and beyond. "We've even gotten things from Neiman Marcus,"

Williams says. "We've had christening clothes that are adorable. People aren't saving clothes as much anymore. They are reselling even the most precious things." The Hall Tree also carries a selection of maternity clothes.

*Another consignment shop such as Once Upon a Child offers clothes, accessories and furniture for resale, call at 346-5552, 272-2229 or 526-1333. Call the Hall Tree at 358-9985.*

## **8. Book babies**

About four years ago, Elyse Leech, children's librarian for the City of Richmond Library, instituted Book Babies, an interactive time when parents and their babies, ages infant through 12 months, sit on the floor, reading. "We have a pile of books that we read and we talk about the pictures," Leech explains. "Most are board books, so if baby wants to pat or grab the book, we let the baby have it and then we go on to the next book." The casual sessions are interactive — babies play, touch the books and if they are old enough, they repeat simple words. Leech also incorporates simple songs such as "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" and finger plays into Book Babies. "That helps them work on developmental skills and eye-and-hand coordination," Leech says. "It also helps them with vocabulary. Hearing different speech can help increase vocabulary and help babies understand what the parent is saying."

*For more information and schedules for Book Babies, call 646-4768 and ask for the children's department, or call your local branch. Check with county libraries and retail bookstores for similar programs.*

## **9. Getting together**

Motherhood can be a lonely experience at times, especially if you are a new mom. You can connect with others by joining a group such as MOMS — Moms Offering Moms Support. Marjorie Simmons, president of the MOMS-Mechanicsville North branch, explains that the group is comprised of moms who either stay at home or work at home. Meetings include activities, crafts and group trips. "Most of the activities for children are targeted to preschool children," Simmons says. "But we do anything we can do to support moms with new babies. We manage a network of play groups by age." Simmons had just moved to Richmond when she joined the group. "It's a terrific resource if you are new to the area," she says. "It gives you an instant connection. I wanted to find friends for my children, but I also found friends for myself. The nice thing is that it's a small group that's warm and welcoming and very accepting of new faces."

*For more information about MOMS, visit [www.moms.club.org](http://www.moms.club.org) or email Simmons at [Marjorie@wadesimmons.com](mailto:Marjorie@wadesimmons.com).*

## **10. Need help**

Are you in need of help or in a position to help another mom in need? The Berryman B.E.A.R. (Baby Emergency Assistance in Richmond) program seeks and distributes donations of emergency products for infants, young children and pregnant women. Items include formula, baby food, diapers, wipes, blankets, and clothing for babies up to 24 months.

*For more information, call 646-7345.*