

# the Baby College connection



Illustration: Deranie Henderson, age 16

## LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Greetings, graduates!

I hope this latest edition of our Baby College Connection finds you and your family doing well.

We just completed our interest meeting for the HCZ **Harlem Gems Pre-K** program and for the new HCZ **Head Start** program. We had 60 parents attend and received information about these wonderful, free all-day programs. If you missed our interest meeting and have a child born in 2001 or 2002, please contact me at the Baby College office as soon as possible so we can give you an application.

On March 15th, we are having a big **Women's Day celebration**. We will be honoring the accomplishments of women throughout history, as well as celebrating the everyday work that our mothers do to take care of our children. You should be receiving details in a separate mailing.

While the warm weather is just around the corner, this time of year is tax time. Please come to the Baby College office to take advantage of our free tax help program. We have staff people who can help you complete your tax forms from 5 – 9 p.m., Tuesdays through Fridays.

Our next Baby College cycle begins in April, so if you know of any expectant parents or parents of children aged 0-3 who have not already taken our course, please let them know about us and have them sign up.

Also, a reminder that our **"Read Continued over**

HELPING YOUR CHILD BY EXPRESSING YOURSELF THE RIGHT WAY

## Learning to talk to your child

By **T.B. Brazelton, MD** and **Joshua Sparrow, MD**

"Is it okay for me to talk 'baby talk' to my baby?" many parents wonder. Of course it is. The high-pitched voice you use lets your baby know you are talking to her! It's also fine to talk the way you usually do. The most important way you can help your child learn to talk is by talking with her, long before she knows how to talk back. Before she has words, watch her face and body language and let her know you understand these early ways she has for communicating.

Your baby starts learning to talk months before her first word. When you lean over your 3-month-old to say, "How're you doing?" she'll wriggle and smile. You'll smile back, and this time your baby coos. Already, you're communicating! A baby who doesn't may be giving you an early warning of a delay in this area.

For your baby to learn to speak, she will need to be able to hear. Ear infections in the first and second years can interfere with a baby's hearing, and their ability to learn to speak, if they are long lasting or keep coming back. Be sure your doctor takes your child's ear infections seriously, and that he or she checks for fluid that can collect in the middle

ear and block sounds from coming through clearly. There are good treatments for ear infections (antibiotics) and for draining the fluid (ear tubes).

You'll hear your baby's first clear sounds ("mama," "dada") later in the first year. If not, this could be another early sign of a speech problem. At nine months, your baby should be able to let you know he wants you with the sounds he can make, even though they don't yet come out as words. Sometimes a delay in the coordination of tongue and mouth muscles prevents a child from reproducing the sounds he hears. A nine-month-old should also be pointing with his index finger. It makes him feel powerful!

When your toddler is 18 months old, she'll be able to point at things she wants, or things she wants you to teach her how to say. If you hold up an object, she may use a word to name it. By now she may be able to put two words together: "What's dat?" If not, you can help her learn: Show her a toy and ask her, "Tell me—what is it?" Reading together is also a big boost to her learning. Your toddler loves it when you read the same, familiar book over and over, and point to a picture to ask, "What's that?" "Dog." "What does the dog say?" "Woof Woof!!!"

When your child is two, she should

# Talking to your child

be able to understand two instructions in a row and respond to them. For example: "Go to your room and get your jacket." Her voice should sound clear, not scratchy or hoarse. Now she can imitate words, name everyday objects, and even use two words together in a short sentence. If not, talk with your child's pediatrician about a speech and language evaluation. Though some children won't learn to speak until later, it can take time to find out if there is a problem and what the problem is, so it's best to get started at about 24 months.

Different children will learn to talk at different ages, but there are several common reasons for children to speak late that are not serious problems. For example, a third or fourth child may speak later because everyone knows what she wants before she opens her mouth. When two or more languages are spoken at home, children may also speak later. It's worth it, though, because a child who learns two or more languages early will be better prepared for learning other languages.

Getting help for a child who is unable to speak after 24 months of age can make an enormous difference—for her success at school, her friendships, and her self-esteem. There are many reasons for speech delays: some are more serious and require special help, the sooner the better. In some cases, a speech and language evaluation may be the best way to determine the cause and the next steps to take.

## When to worry, when to get help:

■ If your child must watch your face to understand you, she may be reading your lips to make up for a hearing problem.

■ If your child looks away when you ask a question, she may be trying to hide how hard it is for her to answer. If this is the case, she also won't get

## Babies and birthdays

Mother: Madina Traore  
Child: Moussa Keita  
born Oct. 23, 2004



Mother: Marcellina Cummings  
Child: Daniel Cummings  
born Oct. 27, 2004



Mother: Trevene Currie  
Child: Jaylen Oumar Pauling  
born Jan. 29, 2005

Contact The Baby College Office to have your newborn's photo here

involved in conversations though she may put in a word now and then.

■ If your child looks at others with blank, inattentive eyes, seems hypersensitive to sound and overwhelmed by new, exciting situations, or seems to withdraw into the same repetitive activity when you reach out to him, and doesn't interact socially with gestures. These can be signs of delays in other areas of development in addition to speech.

■ If your child leads you to where she wants to go or points to something that interests her, she may understand but can't find the right words.

■ If your child stops speaking as well as she once did, she could have a specific neurological disorder that can cause this.

■ If your child speaks easily with you and other family members, but doesn't speak with strangers or at school, she may have a kind of anxiety that prevents her from talking in those settings.

■ If your child can't express herself and is frustrated and aggressive, she may be showing you the price she is already paying for her speech delay.

■ If your child shows any of these signs, or if you are worried about your child's hearing or speech, talk to her pediatrician, and then get an evaluation with a speech therapist who understands small children. A hearing test will usually be the first step.

■ If you need help getting a pediatrician or a speech and language evaluation, be sure to talk to your Baby College Outreach Worker. He or she can put you in touch with the right professionals and with the Legal Aid Society to help you fight for what your child deserves. ■

## Another organization that can offer useful information:

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASLHA)  
10801 Rockville Pike  
Rockville, MD 20852  
(800) 498-2071  
Phone/TTY: (301) 571-0457  
Fax (877) 541-5035  
www.asha.org

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## WORD PUZZLE

Can you unscramble these? The first 10 people to bring in the answers to The Baby College Office will receive a gift. Hint: All the words can be found in the lead article.

GNRHIAE

UGETON

RESHAO

ENGALUGA

### Bonus question:

According to Drs. B and Sparrow, what is a good treatment for ear infections?

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## LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

**To Me" series** will resume in April. You should be hearing from our outreach workers soon about that great workshop. Also a reminder that our **father's group** meets every other Tuesday—for those interested, please call Marvin Hayes at the Baby College office.

We are also coming up on our HCZ **Promise Academy Charter School lottery** time. If you have a child who will be in kindergarten or sixth grade next September, I urge to come see me and fill out an application. This is a great, great school and it is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for you to get your children a superior education without any charge. But you must apply—the deadline for applications is March 21st.

As you can see we have many things happening. We would like to stay in contact with you, therefore we ask you

to inform us of any changes to your address or phone number.

Additionally, you will receive a letter introducing new staff members who will be very interested in talking with you. Your responses to their questions will allow us to improve our work with you and to begin the planning of our largest reunion—of ALL Baby College graduates. We cannot do this without your input—I look forward to your assistance.

Lastly, I'd like to congratulate the 73 graduates of our latest Baby College series, Cycle 14 at PS 197. Welcome to our extended Baby College family and our newsletter, which you will be receiving regularly.

Yours truly,  
MARILYN JOSEPH  
Program Director