

DEVELOPING
KIDS ARE DIVINE

Valbona Ava Levin & Peter Levin

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How to Create a Healthy and Happy Genius



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1

PARENTS KNOW WHAT IS BEST FOR THEIR KIDS

Kids are growing and developing all the time. We as adults and therapists support their inner forces and guide them to a healthy and happy life. With some tricks and sound advice learning becomes even easier and fun. Children who develop their motor skills and sensory capabilities have a good chance to integrate them in complex tasks. Well developed children are casually learning languages and math, are creating new strategies that might turn out to be effective. The goal of sensory-motor integration is to free the mind and spirit of a child to develop its genius.

Parents are key in their children's development. They all want their child to be healthy and happy. For them, knowing why the first year of life is so important, offers a major advantage. They are the ones who decide whether their baby spends most of the day sitting or lying. They are the ones who are sitting at their bedside in day and night, holding them if they are desperate or in fever. Holding is the physical, emotional, and spiritual way of caring and loving a newborn and baby. The only secrets absent in the sequence drawn by the artist are the parents, who are invisible even though they stand strong behind every step of the way (See Fig 1: Sequence of child development in the first year).

The famous British pediatrician, Donald Winnicott, watched mothers holding their babies with their bodies, their hands, and their songs. He was so amazed seeing the effect on the baby, that he even created a concept out of it. As therapist we have to constantly work on our ability to create holding in therapy. Sometimes we are jealous how easy this is for a parent to bring serenity and stillness to a screaming baby. Winnicott stressed that caring and loving mothers are „good enough“. He wanted to take off the pressure of mothers who feel they need to be perfect. He knew parents only want the best for their child, they give all they have and they are the ones who know best what their baby needs. Whatever this book suggests, it is meant as an offer to support their efforts. There is no intention to criticize those who are committing their life and resources to the well-being of a child. On the contrary, the purpose of the book is to ease the pressure on parents by sound advice. We feel strongly about the content and accuracy of the information presented here. Still, we are aware that life is complex and the divine order and rules of development play out in many different ways. Parents are in charge and information about child development is only as good as they can feel free to find out what helps and what disturbs them and their child. We can offer our experience in this process of finding ways to have a happy life as a family. The information presented in this book is from the point of view what a child needs in the first year. The baby might be at the center, but it is not the only member of the family. The needs of parents and siblings are also important. It turned out that there is one question most parents find helpful: Is it good for me or good for my child? Both are important and a happy family life

is possible if there is a dynamic balance of needs and desires. Some baby activities parents enjoy are good because they are good for them. As long as they enjoy doing it there is absolutely no reason to worry. But if parents feel the pressure to organize the life of their baby, we think it is good to remember: All your kids need is your presence and care. Otherwise, the baby is well and fine and in the hands of the laws of nature; or as we like to put it: following the divine order and discovering the secrets of developing an embodied soul.



Figure 1: Sequence of child development in the first year

The advice offered is based in a deep understanding of the rules and laws of child development; and in a life-long experience in working with and studying kids in different settings, in teaching and therapy, with parents and educators. While there is a general plan for development, a divine order of what come first and the steps to take next, you as parents are dealing with an individual soul. The baby that came into your life is special and more than special to you. You know what is at stake; and knowing what love for a child is, you spare no pain to gain further understanding. For you, this famous quote is a no brainer without a disclaimer: „Understanding always means understanding what is at stake“ (Hannah Arendt).

As a parent you know what is at stake, the well-being of their most precious gift. Advice offered in this book is always in awe and support for your cause. Your dedication is supreme, even if you complain, it is your freedom you are willing to loose. Some of the hints and ideas presented here, may sound too strict or strong to your freedom-loving ear. While reading the book, you may always remember, exaggerations are no good. If you are interested in a deeper understanding, there will be another book for a closer look. This book is especially for you, while pregnant or already a mother or father of an infant. You might benefit from if your child is a bit older. In case your older child has problems developing, there are many good therapeutic options you can chose from. There is a long tradition in behavioral and physical therapy often built on the groundbreaking works of Berta and Karel Bobath, Karol Vojta and A. Jean Ayres - just to name four out of the many who contributed to the field (see portraits

of Berta and Karel Bobath, and Jean Ayres). Some of them focused on children with serious neurological issues while stressing the need to understand normal development.

Our clinical experience is limited to mainly healthy kids. That is also the reason why you as a parent may just take the advice we offer - and run with it. We watched many children grow up well and have a strong sense that what we suggest is real and applicable. The book may just help you prevent you from repeating mistakes we and others made. This is already a big deal. Avoiding issues is both more elegant and cheaper than reworking them. Sometimes, diseases and injuries like birth trauma can make your child's development more difficult in the long term. These are problems that can be resolved. There are many successful therapeutic options for coping with missed developmental steps. We work with an integrative treatment approach that combines sensorimotor and emotional-cognitive aspects, osteopathic tissue treatment and developmental exercises. This approach focuses on the Golden Years (GOYA), called GOJA (goldene Jahre) in German.

We want you to experience the golden years of early development as golden times experiencing the secrets of sensorimotor development with your child. There are secrets you don't want to talk about; and secrets that burden us if we don't share them.

We both grew up in a large family with many children and wanted to know what was good for our own child and the children of siblings and relatives. Having knowledge about child development helped us a lot. As therapists however, we can only help if there are problems. Everyone else in our families has a job that

helps someone else proactively. We have a profession that allows us to act only after the fact. Turning frustration into a labor of love we started writing down the early warning signs of somatic and linguistic problems. After a lengthy process of questioning and drilling, we found answers in the sensorimotor development during the first year. There are indeed indicators we may be able to influence and prevent problems before they arise. Understanding the sensorimotor development of your child may also help you accept why most of the time, doing less is all that is needed to prevent further mess.



Figure 2: Berta and Karel Bobath knew each other from their hometown Berlin and met again as jewish refugees in London. They married and worked together until their death in 1991. Berta being a physical therapist and Karol a neurologist, they created the Bobath concept of treating neurologically-impaired adults and children.