

Pointers For Parents

New Book Offers Relief for Parents of Babies and Toddlers by Putting Responsibility for Child Rearing in the Hands of the True Experts

There is relief for parents who need information on parenting but are inundated by too many books that tell them **how** to raise their child. A new book by ZERO TO THREE, *Bringing Up Baby: Three Steps to Making Good Decisions In Your Child's First Years* offers a unique 3-step approach that helps parents make good parenting decisions through a process of decoding *both* their child's behavior and their own.

Bringing Up Baby is based on the fact that parents are the true experts on their own children. It recognizes that if parents understand what they bring to parenting and what makes their child tick, the most complicated parenting decisions are made simpler.

The book presents a common sense, 3-step approach: Step One: Understanding Who I Am As a Parent; Step Two: Tuning Into My Child; Step Three: Making Sensitive and Effective Decisions.

Step One: Understanding Who I Am As a Parent

Parents have a profound influence on their child's development, especially during the early years. Parents play a vital role in helping children feel safe and secure and in being prepared to explore and learn about the world around them. Three key factors that influence how parents make parenting decisions are: 1) their hopes and fears concerning their child, 2) their own childhood experiences, and 3) their temperament.

Hopes and Fears

All parents have dreams for their child. They may dream that their child will be a gifted musician, teacher, or athlete. Parents also have fears. Once parents understand these hopes and fears, they are in a better position to clearly see who their child really is and to more effectively respond to their child's unique personality and interests.

For example, one dad recognizes that his hope is for an athlete in the family, so he can be a coach like his



There's no one-size-fits-all approach to parenting.

own dad. However, this hope fades as he realizes that his son is not interested in sports but in art. If dad can acknowledge that this is *his* interest, not his son's, he can help his son feel loved and respected by honoring and encouraging his interests and who he is, not who he wants his son to be.

Parents' Childhood Experiences

How many parents have opened their mouths to say something to their child and thought, "Uh-oh! I am becoming just like my mom!?" Parents are deeply influenced by childhood experiences, which can consciously or unconsciously shape their approach to parenting.

When parents have an intense reaction to something about their child, it is important to try to figure out what is triggering this strong reaction and why. After understanding the *why*, parenting decisions can be made based on the here and now, not on experiences from the past.

Temperament

Temperament influences the way that a person reacts to the world and the strategies she uses to manage her reactions. Temperament expresses itself in many ways.

Temperament influences *who* a person is and *how* he or she parents. If a parent who is very active has a

child who loves to sit and explore quietly, recognizing and respecting these differences helps the parent separate her needs from her child's.

Step Two: Tuning Into My Child

A child's temperament and approach to the world has a significant impact on his or her behavior. Temperament can be understood by looking at five key characteristics that help parents identify who their child is and why she reacts the way she does. Effective strategies for dealing with a broad range of child rearing issues from sleep to discipline to feeding depend on an understanding of these key temperament traits. Keep in mind that these traits represent a continuum. Each end of the range is described below but most children fall somewhere in between:

Intensity of reaction. *Low reactors* are children who rarely fuss and can tolerate a lot of stimulation. They are often less demanding. On the other end of the spectrum are the *big reactors*, with intense feelings and emotions that they have a hard time managing.

Activity level. On one end of the continuum are *sitters* who are not action-oriented and are content to sit and play quietly. On the other end are the *movers* who are constantly on the go.

Frustration tolerance. "*I-give-up*" kids are easily frustrated and get very upset the minute something doesn't go their way. They tend to give up quickly when faced with a challenge. On the other end of the spectrum, "*Let's-try-again*" kids are persistent and can tolerate waiting to have their needs met.

Reaction to new people. "*Let's-take-it-slow*" kids are hesitant and shy around people they don't know. They need time and support to warm up before they feel comfortable enough to interact. "*Glad-to-meet-you*" children are eager to meet new people and engage

newcomers by smiling, cooing, talking, and looking them in the eye.

Reaction to change. "*I-like-things-the-way-they-are*" children find changes especially hard and have great difficulty with transitions. These children rely heavily on routines and order to feel safe and secure and can be upset by the smallest change. "*Show-me-what's-new*" children embrace change and take it in stride. They find new situations interesting and are comfortable most anywhere you take them.

Step 3: Making Sensitive and Effective Decisions

This step helps parents apply what they know about themselves and their children to make good parenting decisions that work for the family as a whole. A dad who recognizes his need for perfection decides to be a coach to his toddler rather than a fixer. An outgoing mom who learns that her child needs time to adjust to new people and social situations helps her child prepare for these experiences and provides the support and time needed to feel comfortable before venturing out.

"*Bringing Up Baby* works because it starts with the premise that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to parenting," says co-author Claire Lerner, MSW. "Once parents begin to understand and use this 3-step process, they can apply it to almost any child-rearing issue they face."

ZERO TO THREE is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing the healthy social, emotional, and intellectual development of America's babies and toddlers.

To order a copy of *Bringing Up Baby* call 1-800-899-4301 or visit the online bookstore at www.zerotothree.org/bookstore. Price: \$14.95