

Happy Baby, Happy Family



Learning to
trust yourself
and enjoy
your baby

Sarah Beeson MBE

HEALTH VISITOR

Edited by Amy Beeson

Sarah Beeson

**Happy Baby, Happy Family: Learning
to trust yourself and enjoy your baby**

«HarperCollins»

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Answers to the questions real mum and dads have during the first year. There isn't one perfect way of parenting: every single baby and family is unique. Feeling confident, authentic and positive about your role as a parent is key to building a loving relationship. This book helps you find your parenting style so you can be the parent you want to be. Written by Sarah Beeson MBE, who has over 40 years hands-on experience of working as a health visitor, this book is full of the author's secrets and tried and tested strategies on breastfeeding, sleeping, weaning, calming your baby and forming a secure attachment. Nurturing, practical and refreshingly honest, this book embraces the idea that one-size parenting doesn't fit all, but with Sarah Beeson's book to hand you have a best friend with great advice and a gentle approach to guide you through the first.

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To my family Amy, Takbir and Ava

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Sarah Beeson MBE

In our lives there are often times when we feel overwhelmed by responsibility – even when it's something we've been longing for, the reality can be a bit of a shock. When I started my nursing and health visiting career, the challenges I faced and overcame influenced the rest of my life. Becoming a parent, too, can be all-consuming and you begin to question whether you can do it. After four decades devoted to better understanding the needs of children, I can honestly say that this is the best generation of parents there has ever been.

During wonderful years nursing at Hackney Hospital I discovered that my calling was to be a health visitor, and then there was no looking back. I went on to be one of the youngest health visitors in the country, working with families in Kent and then Staffordshire. I was honoured to receive the MBE from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II for services to children and families. My health-prevention work was also recognised when I was given the Queen's Nursing Institute Award. Life as a health

visitor was hard work, inspiring, exhausting and very fulfilling. I thought I'd continue working in the community until my retirement and then settle down to a quiet life in the country.

The inspiration for putting pen to paper on the advice I shared every day with parents as a health visitor was the arrival of my own grandchild. I had been working on how best to communicate the emotional needs of children in my everyday practice since the 1970s, but I hadn't written anything except a few articles and leaflets. At the heart of all the practical advice I was sharing was the wish to ensure parents could see *how* they were meeting their baby's emotional needs, and *why* it is so important.

Health visiting gave me the opportunity not just to help families but to learn from them. To really make a difference you have to address the needs of the whole family, and, most importantly, to listen to their problems, concerns and worries. The first step is to build a relationship with parents and earn their trust in order to give the advice that is right for them.

If you are in the UK and have a health visitor, they may be someone you have a close relationship with or it may be that due to the rapidly declining numbers of health visitors and the service being reduced, your health visitor might not play a big part of your experience with your new baby. I know there is nothing like a one-on-one service, but I do hope this book will help parents to feel like they have access to the advice I have built up over a lifetime of practice in the community.

A good health visitor doesn't think they know it all, no matter how long they've practised; when you walk into someone's home or speak to them at clinic you're just getting a glimpse of how things are. A health visitor has to give families both time and the opportunity to engage. Families shouldn't fit the health visiting service – the service offered should be shaped around the needs of families, and at some point every parent needs support, someone to talk to, advice and solutions. Every parent needs that, including me.

When you offer parenting advice, it's crucial that mums and dads don't feel judged and that you don't have a one-size-fits-all approach. When parents are talking to you, if you are thinking about what you are going to say next then you aren't really listening, and the opportunity to really help them will be missed. That has always been my approach to health visiting; it's one I learned from working with some truly exceptional nurses and health visitors right at the beginning of my career, and it has translated into the style of advice I offer to parents.

My journey from health visiting to writing started when my lovely daughter Amy Beeson became pregnant and asked me to email her advice on how to feed her baby for the first time. It was a joy to pass on all the secrets I'd learned from working with knowledgeable health professionals and dedicated parents. Amy told me she hadn't come across my style of advice in any of the baby books she was reading. There was so much she and her friends wanted to know; could I do some more? Before I knew it, I was writing a parenting book, and Amy was editing it for me during her Little One's nap times. Time flew by and my daughter's year of maternity leave was over. It's such a difficult time for so many women; few of us ever feel we've got the balance between all our responsibilities right. Then something life changing happened: not just one but several publishers wanted our parenting book (the book you're reading right now). We were thrilled, and surprised they also wanted us to write my true story of nursing in Hackney (*The New Arrival*) and about health visiting in Kent in the 1970s (*She's Arrived!*).

Amy and I waved goodbye to our steady jobs and now work together writing and meeting wonderful readers and parents. I never imagined I'd be an author but, more importantly, passing on my knowledge and experience to parents is a huge privilege – and sometimes it's a little daunting. Focusing on why I do the job that I do is what really matters, and it's no different today than it was all those years ago. I want a world filled with happy babies, and for mums and dads to see what a fantastic start in life they are giving their children by putting them at the centre of their lives and meeting their emotional needs as well as their practical ones.

I hope your own new arrival fills your life with joy – and thank you for letting us come on this special journey with you.

Visit www.sarahbeeson.org to find out more and download your FREE poo colour chart.

[Discovering Your Parenting Style](#)

One thing I've learned after four decades working with literally thousands of families from all walks of life and in all kinds of circumstances is this – there isn't one perfect way of parenting; every single baby and family is unique. It is the parents or the person who is the main carer for a child who has the greatest insight into the needs of their Little One.

I promise you, no matter who you are or how things might look from the outside, every good parent has doubts about their abilities or the choices they are making. One way you could use this book is as a companion that offers solutions to help you find your parenting style and to give you reassurance when you need it, so you can be the parent you want to be. Feeling confident, authentic and positive about your role as a parent is key to building a loving relationship with your child. If there is one thing I'd like this book to achieve, it would be to help parents trust themselves and enjoy their time with their baby, because they grow so fast.

I have a simple philosophy underlying all my parenting advice: babies who have a strong attachment to their mothers (or the main caregiver) are more likely to grow into happy children, adolescents and adults who have a good relationship with you and will turn to you in times of need and celebrate with you in times of joy. It sounds simplistic but I do believe that when parents love and nurture their children the result is a happy baby, as well as happy mums and dads; and ultimately this results in happier families and a better society.

In this book we'll look at practical care from birth until your baby's first birthday. At first life will revolve around feeding, trying to get them to sleep and an endless stream of dirty nappies, but things do change rapidly during your baby's first year. Experience has shown me that it is helpful for mums and dads to know what to expect and to have some solutions for dealing with common problems. We'll look at what it means when a baby is behaving in a certain way, what you can do to help your baby, and how the approach you take will reinforce your Little One's ever-growing sense of attachment to you.

The one-to-one service I offered as a health visitor cannot be fully replicated in this book, as so much comes out of having an ongoing conversation with mums and dads. I don't think there has ever been a single mum who would have received all the advice that's in here, because she wouldn't have needed it. It is unrealistic and unhelpful to suggest there is one way of caring for a baby. To create the expectation that there is a single right way of doing things doesn't help parents, and it doesn't help babies – it just makes people feel angry or anxious.

Many parents want to learn more about their child's development and the practical and emotional needs of their baby – but where do you start? There is so much information but often it doesn't go into the detail you may need, and you aren't always sure of the authority of the person who's written it. When it comes to childcare, advice can be very slanted to a particular method of caring for babies, and you may feel that you and your baby don't fit that mould. We have to experiment and do what works for us and our family.

The unconditional and overwhelming love most parents have for their baby is like no other (though not everyone will experience that right away; for some it takes time and can depend on the circumstances around the birth of their child). It is love that can give you an inner strength you never knew you had. Love is the greatest gift we can ever give our children; a baby that feels loved every day is going to be a happy baby.

We feel loved when our needs are met, when we get daily affection and understanding, when we are treated with kindness and respect, and are secure and know we come first. A baby is no different; they are just a tiny person who needs that love more than anything – a baby needs to know there is

at least one person who absolutely cares for them. Everything else you do is a choice; we make small decisions every day and are continually adapting to new situations – that is the most any parent can do.

It's good to understand what your baby's needs are and base your day around them, but you'll probably need some flexibility to adapt to what each day brings. You'll notice patterns emerging and develop a rhythm and understanding of what makes your baby happy so you can create an adaptable mini-routine that is right for you both. It's paramount that you give yourself the time and space to develop confidence in yourself as a parent and recognise your ability to tune in to your baby's daily needs. How you want to care for your baby and shape your day is down to you; every family is different, and your baby is a unique individual, but there are basic needs that all babies have, and it can only boost your confidence and ability as a parent to read, think and discuss what they are.

For me the Dalai Lama expresses this perfectly: he says, 'Everyone can understand from natural experience and common sense that affection is crucial from the day of birth; it is the basis of life.' Keep that in mind and you are already on the road to forming a wonderful relationship with your baby.

I hope you enjoy your baby every step of the way, and remember there's no better or more challenging role in the world than becoming a parent. I know how much you want to do the best you can for your baby, and I've seen first hand that more and more parents are making their baby their top priority – and it's having a big effect: happier babies.

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