

Peekaboo tactics and other parenting advice

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By MATT WIXON / The Dallas Morning News

Right now, thousands of expectant parents are at hospitals eagerly awaiting the arrival of what they are sure will be the cuddliest, most lovable, most amazing and saintly creature in the world:

The doctor with the pain medication.

After that, those expectant parents will greet what truly is the most lovable, most adorable, most saintly creature to enter the world: a baby. More specifically, a sleeping newborn baby – the pinnacle of serenity, sweetness and innocence.

And then the little angel will wake up, and Mommy and Daddy will become basket cases.

"Why is my baby not sleeping through the night?" parents ask during their baby's first year. "Why is she not saying Mama or Dada? Why is he not able to grasp a peanut from the carpet?"

A better question is "Do we want our baby, who puts everything in his mouth, to grasp anything from the carpet?"

You bet you do, according to the baby experts, who are writing feverishly to assure that parents will have a panic attack before

their first child makes it to training pants. Your baby should be sleeping through the night at 3 months, the experts say, and be able to sit without support at 7 months. Consult your pediatrician if you have questions.

Fine. Here's a question for my pediatrician: One baby-guru book tells me my 4-month-old should be able to pay attention to a raisin. Well, how can I tell if my baby is following the raisin with his eyes or is just following my hand holding the raisin?

Luckily, not every guidebook is designed to convince moms and dads that they are unfit to care for a Chia Pet, let alone a baby. Three titles are even (parents may remember this word from before they had children) *fun*.

Baby: An Owner's Manual

Steve Tague and Julie Long (Broadway Books, \$10.95)

Written and organized like an owner's manual for a new car, this book has sections on filling, cleaning, lubricating and covering the baby and provides tips on how to set the baby's clock to avoid owner sleeplessness.

It also includes a diagram of the baby's parts, product specifications, optional features and scheduled maintenance. It highlights the differences in the two models, BABY-XX-G and BABY-XY-B, and includes the important note that BABY-XY-B may spray without notice.

The owner's manual also has important safety tips for parents, such as what to do if they smell gas – "clean unit's exhaust area thoroughly and attach new rear cover." New owners are advised to reduce the risk of shocking the unit by not exposing it to electrical

outlets, wires or obnoxious relatives. The manual even includes a troubleshooting guide for parents suffering when their beloved unit's "display panel" constantly blares its "audio-alert system."

As far as assessing a unit's performance, there is nothing about paying attention to a raisin. The manual stipulates that a 4-month-old might be able to hold its processor (head) steady and pull hair from its owner's head.

Sadly, the manual makes no mention of when to rotate the wheels on a unit. But as an authorized service provider of my own BABY-XY-B, I suggest doing it while singing "The Wheels on the Bus Go Round and Round."

Baby's First Tattoo

A Memory Book for Modern Parents

Jim Mullen, illustrated by Barry Blitt

(Simon & Schuster, \$12.95)

When the wheels on the parenting bus seem to be falling off, there is *Baby's First Tattoo: A Memory Book for Modern Parents*. It's the perfect memory book for those who know that for every melt-your-heart parenthood moment, there's a melted crayon on the new white couch.

Baby's first haircut, baby's first steps and baby's first word – yes, there are books for that. But *Baby's First Tattoo* documents the memories parents really never forget, such as Baby's First Projectile Vomit, Baby's First Four-Letter Word and First Time Baby Nearly Poked Out Eye on Sharp Corner. Also captured are First Time Baby Broke an Irreplaceable Heirloom, First Time

Mom Asked, "What's the Point of Having Decent Furniture?" and The One Thing in the World That Keeps Baby From Crying and Who Forgot to Pack It.

As the baby gets older, there are places to record Baby's First Day of Soccer Practice, Parents' First Fight with Baby's Coach and Parents' First Fight With Other Parents (including a spot to attach news clippings of the fight).

In the "Growing Pains" category, there are places to record baby's first timeout, body piercing, arrest, automobile totaled and, of course, that first tattoo.

For those considering parenthood, the book might be the perfect contraceptive. For new parents, *Baby's First Tattoo* is a reminder that they are not alone when they organize their closets not by the season but by "stained by baby formula" and "soon to be stained by baby formula."

Autobiography of a One-Year-Old

As told to Rohan Candappa

(Bantam Books, \$6.99)

According to the publisher, *Autobiography of a One-Year-Old* is the book your baby would write, if your baby could write. In that case, parents should be very happy that their little ones are illiterate.

"As told to Rohan Candappa," the autobiography has simplistic names for mother and father: Smooth and Hairy. But there is very

little that is simplistic about this baby-toddler as he writes essays about his second year of life.

In playing peekaboo, the 1-year-old discovers that his parents are "a few teddy bears short of a picnic." On the topic of crying, he suggests the best ways to manipulate Smooth and Hairy. – "silent wail with brimming eyes" and "the u-shaped tongue" scream.

The autobiography hits on topics that loom large for 1-year-olds, such as dirty diapers, learning to walk and being fed "tepid glop." But the 1-year-old is also quite philosophical for his age, evidenced by the sections titled "Yes, I know it's just a dirty old piece of blanket, but it makes me happy," and "Would we all get along better if we played in bigger sandboxes?"

He also shows independence at age 15 months when he refuses to continue suffering "the indignity of having to meet any preset development criteria as to my physical, mental and social achievements."

I can only imagine how he felt about learning to follow a raisin.

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