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LIFE HEALTHY FAMILIES

PARENTING NOW!

A new bond: Newborns and parents craft a “language” that’s unique to them



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BY DEBBIE JENSEN

For The Register-Guard

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From the moment of conception, a baby brings change.

A mother experiences a wide range of physical and emotional changes as the baby grows within her during each month of pregnancy. Her partner also experiences a wide range of emotions, new ideas and concerns as the baby grows from a hidden to a very visible being. For many parents who are expecting their first baby, visions of their future child are filled with a sense of joy, wonder and excitement. Frequently, these hope-filled visions also contain questions and even a bit of fear.

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For many parents, it's just as overwhelming to be in front of rows and rows of parenting books or online sites as it is to sift through all the advice they get from friends, family and even strangers in the checkout line at the store. Soon-to-be new parents ask themselves so many questions because they hope to be successful parents, however they define success.

In the past 50 years, research has changed the description of a newborn baby from that of being a "blank slate" waiting for instruction from parents to the idea of a newborn as competent and able to seek out ways to survive and attach to their parents in a relationship. It is now clear that newborns are born with the ability to communicate their needs. In a very real sense, they have a "language" all their own. The challenge for new parents is learning their baby's language.

It's often said that the most effective way to learn a new language is to immerse oneself in the language — to learn Japanese, go to Japan and be immersed in the culture and Japanese words. In the first months after a baby's birth, the care and feeding required is a consuming task — 24 hours a day, every day. This time is an immersion program especially designed by the newborn baby for his or her parents. The continuous interacting between parent and newborn builds a bond of understanding and a common language. Parents quickly learn their baby's signals and cues.

For parents, this common language is built on understanding a newborn's basic needs. The need for food and warmth, safety and security, and human interaction: These are the needs of a newborn. All these needs are met by the voice, facial expressions, touch, smell and taste of the newborn's parent. Newborns form strong bonds with their mother through the sense of taste through breastfeeding and snuggling. Minutes after birth, a healthy breastfeeding newborn can find his first meal from his mother. In the first weeks of life and beyond, the baby continues to seek the warmth, security and safety of a familiar adult body, identifying them by taste and smell. A new parent can experience this behavior when they snuggle their newborn. The baby will quickly begin to nuzzle and taste by mouthing or even licking their parent's neck.

Overtime, parents and babies will learn each other's language. Through Parenting Now!'s "The Language of Newborns" class, which meets once a month (registration: parenting-now.org/event/the-language-of-newborns-15), parents have the opportunity to prepare for the birth of their baby and feel more confident as they learn to recognize the wonderful ways a newborn baby can communicate with the world around them.



Debbie Jensen is a nurse and lactation consultant at PeaceHealth Sacred Heart Medical Center at RiverBend and has a private practice for in-home consultations. She has more than 40 years

of experience in caring for mothers and babies and is a mother of three, grandmother of eight. Parenting Now! is a nonprofit offering groups and workshops so that all children are raised by nurturing, skilled parents. Contact Parenting Now! at www.parentingnow.org, on social media and at 541-484-5316.

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— **Debbie Jensen, Parenting NOw!**

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