

This is National Baby Week,
a good time to learn the benefits of the
vitamin of love—**THE GREATEST
THING YOU CAN
GIVE YOUR CHILD**



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as told to
Adele Whitely Fletcher

AS A PEDIATRICIAN who has cared for more than 8,000 families, I am convinced of two things:

Environment is 10 times more important than heredity.

The vitamin of love—which is my term for love, lovingly demonstrated—is as essential to growth as orange juice or cod-liver oil.

I remember years ago, when we were just commencing to understand the desirability of loving contact, Bellevue Hospital in New York brought elderly men from other wards to the nursery and encouraged them to play with the babies. I am sure the benefits were twofold. Man needs loving from the cradle to the grave.

I must add that, to evoke the happiest results, love must be expressed in terms which children can recognize readily and take pleasure and comfort in.

Unfortunately, love is not always manifested this way. For example, the baby of an apprehensive mother, however much loved, is likely to absorb maternal tension and be fretty. He will react anxiously to any new experience, even such a simple thing as being placed on a doctor's scale.

In other words, the vitamin of love is a combination of attitude and atmosphere.

One of my favorite stories concerns a delightful couple who came to my office with the six-month-old baby they had just adopted. I have, of course, known many children who developed slowly. Nevertheless, I wondered whether this little fellow was going to be all right. His head was an odd shape; he was utterly lethargic.

Yet the change in two months was dramatic. The head shape had improved, but, more importantly, this baby—exchanging coos with his mother, laughing at the silly sounds his father amused him with—had become more responsive than I thought possible. He had become responsive because he had had something to respond to.

Today this boy, approaching his fourth birthday, is one of my most rewarding patients. His development—physical, cerebral, and emotional—has been inspiring. He is loved and knows it.

What, mothers will ask, adds up to an ideal parent-child relationship? Ten simple things,

in my opinion, every one of them a manifestation of the vitamin of love:

1. Children respond to play, happy voices, gay music, and laughter from infancy.

2. The more attention parents pay to children's interests the better, whether it is a picture that a child has colored or a report about the new driver of the school bus. If a choice must be made between finishing the dishes or taking time to listen, leave the dishes rather than the child.

3. "Discipline by substitution" is a phrase to remember. It simply means distracting a child's attention from what he does wrong. In other words, get him interested in something else. This works better than any punishment, particularly with babies at the "grabby" stage.

4. Mealtimes should be happy occasions.
5. Bedtime prayers should be heard, followed by a good-night kiss.

6. At an early age there should be some religious training; parents and children should attend church together. A district attorney told me: "In a family where parents play with the children and hear their prayers at night, delinquency is very rare."

7. Mothers and fathers should be loving friends before they are disciplinarians. It is unkind to force a baby or young child to face up to fear alone. When a child is afraid of the dark, for example, I recommend that a small light be left in the room. When my children were small, I gave them flashlights and turned an exploration of our big barn into an adventure. When they were convinced the dark was empty, not peopled with goblins or other creatures, they took a giant step away from fear.

8. Parents should accept the fact that certain phases of growth present behavior problems. It is more constructive to understand these phases than to rage at them.

Boys and girls from eight to ten, for instance, tend to be self-centered, even domineering. I always advise that their attention be directed toward others; that they be encouraged to take homework to the classmate who is ill or walk a dog for a neighbor. The more praise children receive the less likely they are to need punishment.

9. In a good mother-child relationship, there is no place for "Mother-does-try-so-hard" feelings. It is natural for children to do things which are disappointing to adults. They should not, however, be alarmed by a mother—their source of strength—who shows her own immaturity in whining complaints and tears.

10. Children respond to family life in which the adults show consideration and politeness; eventually they will imitate these virtues.

I am not being sentimental when I say the vitamin of love is the greatest single thing we can give our children. Over and over, I have observed that those who were blessed with the vitamin of love when they were young will mature into well-adjusted adults—and will pass on this precious gift to their own children.

COVER:

You never know where veteran funnyman Bob Hope, now starring in "Critic's Choice," will turn up. Once it was Moscow—where a riotous adventure ensued. See page 6.

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