

Normal Development in Children / Praying for your Children

Ros: Do you remember the moment when you first held a new-born baby? If you're a mother or father, can you remember that moment? You look into the baby's little face to see who he or she looks like... You may see a tiny – mum, or dad, or a grandparent. And you may think, "What does the future hold for this little one?"

Then a friend comes along and says, "Has he got all his fingers and toes?" You open the blankets and count them – 1,2,3,4,5 - 6,7,8,9,10 fingers; 1,2,3,4,5 – 6,7,8,9,10 toes. But just a minute – something's not quite right – two of the toes are joined together. And on the other foot – I missed them when I counted – the same two are joined, right up to the tiny toenail! A strange sensation goes through you and you think, 'My child's not perfect...he's not *normal*.'

Sometime later you ask the doctor whether these joined together toes can be separated to make him like everyone else. He tells you they can and you feel better. But later still, when you really talk about it seriously, he says it would be a big task. He would have to do tricky skin grafts, and in this tropical place they may not heal well. Then he suggests that it might be better to leave them as they are – they won't make any difference to the way he walks, or the things he can do. So finally, you come to terms with it and agree with the doctor to leave these little toes as they are. You decide that he *is* normal - he just has some 'special' toes!

Carol: Hello, you're with us on *Women of Hope*, welcome, I'm Carol. Come and sit with us and enjoy a chat together about our children. We all love to talk about them don't we!

Tammy: I do – they're one of my favorite conversation topics!!

Carol: Ros...you were telling us about a baby that was not quite 'normal'!

Ros: Yes - this was *my* story with my *first baby*, and as the doctor said...it has made *no* difference to my son. Maybe there've been times when he chose to wear shoes instead of sandals to hide his toes – as someone may have teased him at school. But everyone gets teased about something...children can be quite cruel to each other at times, can't they?

In fact, the doctor said, way back then, with a smile: 'He'll be a good swimmer with his webbed toes!' And guess what – he was a *great* swimmer who loved swimming *under* the water as much as on top of it!

28 years later our sweet little granddaughter was born. As we sat gazing at her little face – just like her daddy’s – we opened the blankets and there to our surprise when we counted her fingers and toes, we found the same two toes on each foot joined right to the tiny toenail. Daddy held her proudly and said, “She has special toes like me.”

She’s now 10 years old and loves her special toes! They’ve made no difference to her – she’s a good swimmer and dancer, and she’s a child who developed some of her skills at an unusually early age. When she was only 3 she would read stories to her baby sister, with lovely expression, making the stories come alive.

So – this brings me to the question “What’s normal?”

Carol: I’m sure we all as mothers wonder as they grow, “Is my baby normal? Are they doing the right things at the right time?”

Tammy: And if this is our first baby we have no idea what’s ‘normal’, unless we spend time with other mothers of new babies and can compare ours with theirs.

Ros: That’s right, but you know, sometimes this can make us feel uncertain too. All babies are different, aren’t they? They all develop at slightly different rates and ‘normal’ can be a very wide space of time, or a wide range of skills.

And it’s a funny thing, but a new mother *loves* to tell others what her baby or toddler can do. Have you heard a conversation like this? “My boy is just starting to crawl already, and he can say ‘Mama’ and ‘Dada’ and he *loves* music.”

If you had a baby boy the same age and he was not showing any interest in crawling and was just making babbling sounds with no words yet, how would this make you feel? Yes, you’d begin to think, “I wonder if my baby’s normal?”

So, let’s take a little look at what ‘normal’ development is for a baby and young toddler.

Tammy: Thank you for being with us on *Women of Hope*. Ros was a teacher of young children for many years so she’s going to talk with us about ‘normal’ development in young babies and toddlers.

Ros: One of the first things I learned in my study of child development was that there really is no 'normal'. Every person is born unique...in temperament...in personality...in their abilities. And each skill is learned at a different rate and age. So, let's talk about the very *basic* things that we see develop in a baby.

When a baby's born they've already developed a basic temperament. You may hear a mother say of her newborn: 'Jo is a very difficult baby.' That probably means he cries a lot and is not easily comforted...and he doesn't sleep well. Whereas Soo Lin's mother says: 'Soo Lin is such an easy baby. She sleeps a lot, feeds well and seems contented.' So, what can you as a mother do? All you can do is to love and take care of this little one and adapt to their little personality the best you can.

The first thing you will look for is a sense of *connection* with your baby. You will talk to him and cuddle him a lot and soon you'll notice that his eyes will begin to follow your face – and your voice. Then as you're feeding him he'll put his hand up and try to touch your face. As you talk to him a lot you'll see him listening and before long he'll begin to make sounds in response to you.

Tammy: What a pleasure isn't it...the first time you see your baby lying still, looking into your eyes and 'communicating' with you as you talk to him!

Ros: If after a few weeks your baby's not doing *any* of these things – moving his eyes, beginning to make sounds, and moving his hands about, then it's important to see your baby health care person and ask their advice.

Tammy: So, Ros, tell us what else we will see happening.

Ros: Your baby will begin developing his muscles. He'll begin to hold up his own head when you hold him up straight, or when you lie him on the floor on his tummy. He'll begin to reach for and grasp hold of things. At first, he'll drop things just as easily as he holds them. But before too long he'll be able to grasp something long enough to hold it to his mouth and keep it there...to learn more about its shape and texture. It's very 'normal' for a baby to put things into his mouth. We need to try to be sure that the things he picks up are clean...and that he cannot reach things so small he could swallow them.

He will also be developing *big* muscle skills, like learning to roll from his back onto his tummy, or his tummy onto his back. And later, when he can hold his head steady, he'll learn to sit up – firstly

propped up with a little pillow and later on his own, somewhere between about 4 and 7 months. By this time, he'll also begin doing things like clapping his hands, and everyone will get very excited and clap with him! And as you wave to him he'll begin waving back. Soon all the family will be waving and clapping and telling him how clever he is.

Tammy: Yes, we all do that don't we!

Ros: Then will come crawling, and finally pulling himself up and standing, before he takes his first steps...somewhere before or a little after 1 year old.

All these things will show that your baby's developing 'normal' skills – but how long it takes will be very different with each baby.

As a mother, if you're concerned about your baby and feel that he's not responding to you at all – then you have the right to be concerned. Ask your health care worker about it. He or she will test your baby's responses to see if they fit into the 'normal' range and they'll give you advice about what to do.

Of course, there are other kinds of development – like thinking and speaking. Maybe we can talk about these another time.

Tammy: That would be good Ros. Would you come back sometime?

Ros: Sure Tammy, I'd love to. Teaching young children is a fascinating task as they're all so different and so special.

Carol: Welcome back to *Women of Hope*. We have special visitor with us again today. Katherine it is always good to have you with us. Katherine has some special thoughts to share with us about praying for our children.

Katherine: The first time you looked into the face of your tiny baby did you feel just a little bit frightened? You were responsible for this new life—to care for the little body and help it grow.

Even more frightening is the responsibility of training the little mind and heart to make the right decisions...to form good relationships...to learn how to live a happy life.

As I held each of my six children for the first time, I prayed...a prayer for help. I felt I might not be good enough to be the main care-giver for this little one. I asked God for wisdom, patience, and understanding.

One morning, when my first son was very small, he was playing in front of the house and called me to come and see the pretty snake he'd found. The snake was pretty, but it was a copperhead, and very dangerous! I picked up a garden hoe and cut off its head.

I could protect my child from harm that day, but years later, when he got into his second-hand car to drive many miles away to school, I could only pray...

From the early years when I was constantly cleaning up after them and correcting them...to the days when they went off to school and I couldn't be with them all day...to the day they finally moved out on their own, I've prayed *every day* and God has answered in many ways.

Carol: Tell us how he's answered your prayers Katherine.

Katherine: Once, when my oldest daughter was about nine or ten, her teacher called to tell me that my child may have taken some money. Before I talked with her, I prayed hard, and God answered. When she got home from school that day, we had a good talk—without any anger or tears—and the problem was cleared up. Someone had simply misplaced the money and it was soon found. I was grateful that I had not reacted in anger and hurt my child and our relationship.

Many years later another daughter was having dizzy spells and went to the doctor. He sent her to a specialist, saying that it could be very serious. We were both really scared. I prayed earnestly and was able to rejoice with her when the problem was something simple she could easily take care of.

Carol: So have your prayers for your children always been answered?

Katherine: Yes...but not always as I might want. Life for our children sometimes isn't as happy as we'd like, and we can't always protect them from harm. Once, on a family vacation, our youngest son got a tick on his head. A few weeks later he developed flu-like symptoms and after a week he had a terrible seizure that damaged his brain. Crazy with grief and worry, I asked God for peace. I knew my little boy was going to die, and I couldn't stand it. That day, I felt God's loving arms around me, and he filled my heart with peace. My little one died and I missed him terribly, and wept for months. But God's peace kept me from being bitter...and finally it healed my heart. As I

prayed, God taught me that he had my beloved son in his arms in heaven, and that I would see him again one day.

Carol: Were your children ever really rebellious?

Katherine: Oh yes...once my teenage daughter decided to run away from home. She called to say she was at a friend's house because our rules were too strict for her. I loved my daughter so much and was deeply hurt by her decision, so I prayed, asking God to keep her safe and change her heart.

The next day she called and asked her dad to bring her home. She said, "I remembered that I have a family who loves me."

Carol: Oh Wow – you must have been very happy.

Katherine: I was – and I thanked God for bringing her home. Maybe raising children is the best way to learn about God's faithfulness—even when we can't understand what he's doing.

Carol: You have several grandchildren now don't you Katherine?

Katherine: Yes, five, and just as I prayed for their parents, I pray every day for them too.

Carol: Do they all live near you?

Katherine: No, some of them live far away, and I see them about twice a year.

Carol: That makes your prayers more special, doesn't it?

Katherine: Yes, because I don't always know what they're doing. Sometimes, I feel a real need to pray for one of them, and never know why until later.

Carol: What are some of the things you pray about for your grandchildren?

Katherine: Much like I prayed for their parents. I ask that God will help them grow into responsible, adults who love God, and provide suitable partners for them...who also love God.

Carol: Children these days face many new challenges in our world don't they!

Katherine: That's why they need our daily prayers. Sometimes if I know that the kids are facing tests at school or problems with friends I pray for success and safety. Even when I don't know

what's going on with them, God knows, so I can bring them to him each morning, and hand them into his loving care. I know *I* love them a lot – but *God* loves them even more than *I* do!!

Carol: I knew a grandmother once, who had twenty-one grandchildren. She prayed for them all every morning. When I asked how she did it, she laughed and said, "Sometimes I'm late for work."

Katherine: I would be too! But I'd keep praying—just have to get up earlier.

Carol: Thanks Katherine, you've encouraged me to keep praying for my children...every day! God's word, the Bible says (James 5: 16 NLT) '...the earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and wonderful results.'

Tammy: You're back with us on *Women of Hope*. Wasn't that a lovely song (comment on the words).

Praying for your children is *really* important, especially when they're sick. I recently heard a true story about a family working in Papua New Guinea. There were three children in the family and they had lived there for a number of years.

The family was due to leave the country to return home when their youngest child, Jason, became ill. He had a fever and got sicker and sicker as the days passed. His parents took him to the hospital and the doctors said he had cerebral malaria, a very serious illness of the brain. Jason's mother and father regularly prayed for their children, so they pleaded with God to heal their son.

God answered their prayer in a very surprising way...

A man who was a follower of Jesus arrived at the hospital. He had never met Jason or his parents, but God had told him to go and pray for this sick child. And so, he did.

It wasn't long before the doctor could see the improvement in his health. Very quickly the fever left him and the family was able to leave the country as they had planned, with his parents praising God that he did indeed answer their prayer for healing.

Jason is now an adult and he and his wife have recently had their first child. He is grateful that God chose to heal him of this illness and answer the prayers of his mom and dad.

And you know, they called their new son Samuel...meaning 'asked of God'. They have prayed for a long time for this child – and God heard their prayers and chose to give them this precious little boy.

Carol: This is almost like the beginning of our time together today – we could start again and talk

about how amazing it is when you look into the face of your new baby...

Tammy: But it's actually time for us to say goodbye. It has been good to share our time with Ros and Katherine and with you. We'd love to hear from you – anything you'd like to tell us – about your child – about how God has answered your prayers – anything at all. And if you want us to pray for you or your children tell us and we will. Remember what Carol told us... God's word says, '...the earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and wonderful results'. God bless you. Bye.

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