

# the children's hospital at Westmead

# media release

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## Bringing out the Best in Newborn Babies

### ***The Children's Hospital at Westmead* launches free developmental calendar for NSW parents**

The arrival of a new baby is a very special time, particularly for parents and close family members. Knowing what best to do in those vital early months and years, when brain development is so rapid, can be stressful and confusing.

To help new parents navigate their way through this period, *The Children's Hospital at Westmead* is leading the way by providing caregivers with practical advice to maximise their newborn baby's communication, physical, social and emotional development and wellbeing.

On Friday 6<sup>th</sup> February, The Kids Health Unit at *The Children's Hospital at Westmead* launched an exciting new resource entitled, 'Bringing Out The Best in Your Baby', which will be supplied free of charge to all new parents in NSW.

The innovative developmental calendar has been created in consultation with paediatric experts at *The Children's Hospital at Westmead* to provide caregivers with vital information to promote and support healthy growth and development during the first twelve months of life.

"Research has shown that the brain develops rapidly, particularly in the first few months and years of a child's life," said Dr Paul Hutchins, Senior Physician at the Hospital's Child Development Unit.

"A baby's brain is complex in its processing and social interaction already at birth. Millions of brain cells connect with each other in very complex ways. Innate genetic influences and experience refine these connections to produce the learning we observe. Communication and language abilities are influenced particularly early."

"Brain development continues and is adaptable throughout our life, but the early years are the most formative. Early influences and experiences are very important, in children with typical and with different developmental potential and ability."

"By providing your baby with love, comfort and a stimulating environment, parents make a difference. Genes alone do not determine the person a child will become as an adult. Children are born with certain potential that is then modified by the environment in which they live. Recent research shows how much babies are influenced by environmental conditions such as nourishment, care, surroundings and the stimulation they receive, beginning even before birth."

"Healthy development, learning and social and emotional competence and adaptability require opportunities for exploration, achievement, success, approval and self-esteem. The best start in the first years of your baby's life is essential."

"This begins with holding and comforting your baby, talking and singing to and playing with your baby and offering a warm, loving and dependable environment for your baby. Knowing what to expect in children's development encourages and supports parents to engage appropriately with their baby with fun, joy and success – to respect their child's individuality and to adapt to their triumphs and their troubles while not expecting themselves to be 'Super Parents'. The Bringing out the Best in Your Baby' developmental calendar is a very positive support," said Dr Hutchins.

The 2009 'Bringing out the Best in Your Baby' developmental calendar is a revised version of a publication first developed in 2004, which was sold via Kids Health Unit and available online.

"This calendar was initially distributed to over 10,000 health professionals and parents and the response was overwhelmingly positive," explained Candace Douglass, Department Head of Kids Health.

"In fact, from survey results collected, we found that 90% of respondents said that the calendar would influence the frequency and quality of interactions they had with their babies. In addition, amongst the health professionals surveyed, 95% reported that they would use the resource with people who came into their Early Childhood Centre, with 98% of staff believing that the calendar would impact parent and baby interactions."

"In the wake of such strong support we decided that it was important to share this resource with as many new parents as possible, so with the help of our corporate supporter, Shell, we decided to renew the program in 2009 and ensure that all new parents in NSW had free access to the calendar."

'Bringing Out The Best in Your Baby' will be distributed to new parents via Early Childhood Centres in NSW throughout 2009 and outlines a range of practical activities that parents can undertake at home to encourage healthy development. Key milestones are also provided so that parents can enjoy their baby's new skills.

"It is our hope that by making this resource available to all new parents that we will be playing a key role in giving parents the confidence and information they need to enjoy their new baby and give them the very best start in life," said Ms Douglass.

For those not in NSW, Bringing out the Best in your Baby is available in an electronic format at: [www.chw.edu.au/parents/kidshealth](http://www.chw.edu.au/parents/kidshealth)

For more information about 'Bringing Out The Best in Your Baby' Developmental Calendar please call Kids Health on (02) 9845 3585 or email [kidsh@chw.edu.au](mailto:kidsh@chw.edu.au)

### **Media Opportunities**

Dr Paul Hutchins, Senior Physician at Child Development Unit and Clinical Nurse Consultant Gillian Patterson from *The Children's Hospital at Westmead* are available for comment. Additional Images are also available.

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*\* The 'Bringing out the Best in Your Baby' Developmental Calendar is Kindly Supported by Shell Clyde & Gore Bay Staff and Contractors*