

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS

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# Secrets of the Baby Whisperer

Tracy Hogg With Melinda Blau

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

TRACY HOGG, R.N.M.H., M.S.—dubbed “The Baby Whisperer” by her grateful clients—has devoted her career to developing a unique approach to baby and child care. A British-trained nurse, breastfeeding counsellor, and newborn consultant, she has cared for infants and their families for the past twenty-four years. Sharpened by her work with disabled children who often lacked verbal communication skills, Tracy has cultivated an uncanny ability to understand what babies need by listening to their cries and tuning into their body language. Today, she is the consummate teacher, able to share her gift with parents and other professionals.

Born and raised in the north of England, Tracy earned her R.N.M.H. (registered maternal nurse and health worker) after graduating from a five-and-a-half-year course at the Doncaster School of Nursing, where she specialised in children with severe mental and physical disabilities. Given the Nurse of the Year Award for the excellence and compassion she displayed in her field work, her assignments included the Great Ormond Street Children’s Hospital in London, Children’s Hospital in Leeds, a stint with the World Health Organization in India, and St. Catherine’s Hospital for the Mentally Handicapped, where she began to hone her gift for understanding children’s cries, gestures, body language, and other non-verbal cues—a talent she would later apply to babies.

Going to the United States eight years ago, Tracy furthered her education, receiving a master’s degree in

hypnotherapy from the University of California at Irvine. She began to work exclusively with parents and their new babies, helping them make the transition from delivery room to first nappies. Word of Tracy's "magic" spread quickly among parents on both coasts, who praised her skills and begged for her advice.

Since 1995, Tracy has operated Baby Technique, a retail store and consulting enterprise. In addition to working with individual clients, she has organised and taught classes with babies of all ages, counselled breastfeeding mums, and run groups for fathers. Local paediatricians often refer mothers-in-distress to her. Volunteering her time at Sojourn, an organisation for battered women, she has dispensed practical advice to mothers struggling with the most basic issues—for example, how to talk to and play with their children. Wanting to spread her message of respect and empowerment at the professional level as well, Tracy has offered training and placement to other child-care workers. She also has been asked to lecture at the American Institute of Hypnotherapy, where she is an active member.

In 1997, perceiving a widespread need among her high-profile clients for relaxation, Tracy produced an audio tape for breastfeeding mothers. Designed to reduce anxiety and thereby enhance the lactation process, thousands of copies of the tape have already been sold to private clients and over Tracy's Web site ([www.babywhisperer.com](http://www.babywhisperer.com)). Although *Secrets of the Baby Whisperer* is Tracy's first book, she and Melinda Blau are already at work on her second offering, *Secrets of the Baby Whisperer for Toddlers*.

Award-winning journalist MELINDA BLAU writes magazine articles and books on parenting and family issues,

relationships, and social concerns. She became a nationally-known expert on post-divorce family life, testifying in front of the U.S. Commission on Child and Family Welfare, among other venues, following the publication of *Families Apart: Ten Keys to Successful Co-Parenting*, which earned a Distinguished Media Award from the American Association of Applied and Preventive Psychology. Its companion volume is *Loving and Listening: A Parent's Book of Daily Inspirations for Rebuilding the Family After Divorce*.

Blau co-authored *The Second Family: How Adolescent Power is Challenging the American Family* with family therapist Dr. Ron Taffel, for whom she also wrote *Nurturing Good Children Now* and *Parenting By Heart; Watch Me Fly*, the autobiography of civil rights activist Myrlie Evers-Williams; *Our Turn: How Women Triumph in the Face of Divorce* with Dr. Christopher Hayes and Deborah Anderson; and *The Joy of Ritual* and *The Joy of Family Rituals*, which she ghostwrote for spiritual teacher Barbara Biziou.

Blau's work has appeared on the Op-Ed page of *The New York Times*, and she has several magazine covers to her credit. She wrote the "New Family" column in *Child* magazine from 1990 to 1996, winning Best in (Magazine) Category in the American Legion Auxiliary's Heart of America competition and the Association of Marriage and Family Therapy's Excellence in Media award. She has written for numerous other publications as well, including *New Woman*, *American Health*, *Parents*, *McCall's*, *Family Life*, and *The Family Therapy Networker*.

Blau, a New Yorker at heart and the mother of two grown children, currently lives in Northampton, Massachusetts.

# Secrets of the Baby Whisperer

How to calm, connect, and  
communicate with your baby

**Tracy Hogg**  
with Melinda Blau

**Vermilion**  
LONDON

*To*  
*Sara and Sophie*



The anecdotes included in this book are not necessarily based upon the experiences of individuals. A few of the portraits are composites, and in all cases, names and identifying characteristics have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals.

The information and advice presented in this book have been reviewed by medical doctors. They should not, however, substitute for the advice of your personal physician or other trained health care professionals. You are advised to consult with health care professionals with regard to all matters that may require medical attention or diagnosis and to check with a physician before administering or undertaking any course of treatment.

# Foreword

One of the most common questions asked of me by prospective parents is, “What books do you recommend we obtain for guidance?” My dilemma has never been with the choice of a medically-based text, but rather with a solid volume presenting practical, simple, and yet individualised advice about early infant behaviour and development. Now my dilemma is solved.

In *Secrets of the Baby Whisperer*, Tracy Hogg has given new (and even experienced) parents a great gift—the ability to develop early insight into their child’s temperament, a framework for interpreting a baby’s early communication and behaviour, and as a result, a set of very practical and workable solutions for remedying typical infant problems such as excessive crying, frequent feedings, and sleepless nights. One can’t help but appreciate Tracy’s sensible “English” banter—the book is comfy, often chatty, humorous but practical and intelligent. It is an easy read—not overbearing but full of useful content applicable to even the most difficult of baby temperaments.

For many new parents, information overload from well-meaning family members, friends, books and the electronic media creates confusion and anxiety, even before a baby is born. Current publications dealing with typical newborn problems are often too dogmatic or, worse yet, too loose in philosophy. Barraged with these extremes, new parents often develop a style of “accidental parenting”, well-intentioned, but likely to

produce even more problems with Baby. In this book, Tracy emphasises the importance of a structured routine to help parents fall into a predictable rhythm.

She suggests an “E.A.S.Y.” cycle of eating, activity, and then sleep in order to detach the expectation of eating from sleeping, and thus time is created for the parent—You. As a result, babies learn to self-soothe and settle without a breast or bottle association. Cries or behaviour observed after a baby is well fed are then able to be interpreted more realistically by new parents.

In a new parent’s zeal to multi-task and integrate parenting into a “pre-baby” world, Tracy encourages you to “S.L.O.W.” down. She gives very useful suggestions for surviving the postpartum adjustment all family members must make, how to anticipate problems and simplify this most tiring of periods, and therefore how to capture the most subtle, yet most important of cues—the new baby’s desire to communicate. Tracy teaches carers to observe Baby’s body language and responses to the real world, and to use this knowledge to help interpret an infant’s basic needs.

For parents who pick up this book late into their baby’s infancy, helpful suggestions are brought forth to untangle and resolve ongoing difficulties—take heed, old habits can still be corrected. Tracy walks you patiently through the process and will instill in you confidence that parenting (and sleep, and fussiness) can get back on a livable track. For all parents, *Secrets of the Baby Whisperer* will become the dog-eared, well-loved reference we have all been waiting for. Enjoy!

—Jeannette J. Levenstein, M.D., F.A.A.P.  
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INTRODUCTION

# Becoming the Baby Whisperer

The best way to make children good is to make them  
happy.

—Oscar Wilde

## Learning the Language

Let me tell you straightaway: *I* didn't dub myself "the baby whisperer". One of my clients did. It's a lot better than some of the other affectionate names parents have come up with—names like "the witch", which is a bit too scary, "the magician", which is too mysterious, or "the Hogg", in which case I fear they have my appetite in mind as well as my last name. So, the baby whisperer I have become. I have to admit, I kind of like it, because it does describe what I do.

Perhaps you already know what a "horse whisperer" does, or possibly you've read the book or seen the movie of the same name. If so, you might remember how Robert Redford's character dealt with the wounded horse, advancing toward it slowly and patiently, listening and observing, but respectfully keeping his distance as he pondered the poor beast's problem. Taking his time, he finally approached the horse, looked it straight in the eye, and talked softly. The entire time, the horse whisperer stayed steady as a rock and maintained his own sense of serenity, which, in turn, encouraged the horse to calm down.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not comparing newborns to horses (although both are sensate animals), but it's pretty much the same with me and babies. Despite the fact that parents think I have some special gift, there's really nothing mysterious about what I do, nor is it a talent that only certain people possess. Baby whispering is a matter of respecting, listening, observing, and interpreting. You can't learn it overnight—I've watched and whispered to over five thousand babies. But any

parent can learn; every parent should learn. I understand infants' language, and I can teach you the skills you'll need to master it, too.

## How I Learned My Craft

You could say I've spent my life preparing for this job. I grew up in Yorkshire (and make the world's best pudding, by the way). My greatest influence was Nan, my mum's mum—she's eighty-six today and still the most patient, gentle, and loving woman I've ever met. She, too, was a baby whisperer, able to cuddle and calm the crankiest infant. She not only guided me and reassured me when my own daughters (the other two greatest influences in my life) were born, but also was a significant figure in my childhood.

Growing up, I was a jiggling, jumpy little thing, a tomboy who was anything but patient, but Nan could always manage my high energy with a game or a story. For example, we would be waiting in a queue at the cinema, and I, a typical little kid, would be whining and pulling at her sleeve. "How long till they let us in, Nan? I can't wait anymore".

Now, my other grandmum, whom I called Granny—she's no longer living—might have given me a good swat for such insolence. Granny was a true Victorian, believing children should be seen and not heard. In her day, she ruled with an iron hand. But my mum's mum, Nan, never had to be stern. In response to my grouching, she'd just glance at me with a twinkle in her eye and say, "Look what you're missin' by moanin' and just payin' attention to yourself." And with that, she'd fix her gaze in a particular direction. "See that mum and baby over there?" she'd say, pointing with her chin. "Where do you think they're goin' today?"

“They’re goin’ to France”, I’d say, immediately catching on.

“How do you think they’re goin’ to get there?”

“A jumbo jet”. I must have heard the phrase somewhere.

“Where will they sit?” Nan would continue, and before I knew it, not only had our little game taken my mind off the waiting, but we had woven a whole story about that woman. My Nan constantly challenged my imagination. She’d notice a wedding dress in a shop window and ask, “How many people do you think it took to get the dress there?” If I said, “Two”, she’d keep on pressing me for more details: How did they get the dress to the shop? Where was it made? Who sewed on the pearls? By the time she was through with me, I was in India, picturing the farmer who planted the seeds that eventually turned into the cotton used in that dress.

In fact, storytelling was an important tradition in my family, not just with my Nan, but for her sister, their mum (my great-grandmum), and my own mum. Whenever one of them wanted to make a point with us, there was always a tale to go with it. They passed on that gift to me, and in my work with parents today, I often use stories and metaphors: “Would *you* be able to fall asleep if I put your bed on the freeway?” I might say to a parent whose overstimulated baby is having trouble settling down for a nap with the stereo blaring. Such images help parents understand why I make a particular suggestion, rather than my simply saying, “Do it this way.”

If the women in my family helped me develop my gifts, it was Granddad, Nan’s husband, who saw how I might apply them. Granddad was the head nurse in what they then called a lunatic asylum. I remember one Christmas when he took my mum and me to visit the children’s ward. It was a dingy place, with weird sounds and smells and, to my young eyes, disjointed-looking children sitting



in wheelchairs and lying on pillows that were scattered about the floor. I couldn't have been any more than seven, but I still have this vivid image of the look on my mum's face, tears of horror and pity streaming down her cheeks.

I, on the other hand, was fascinated. I knew most people were afraid of the patients and would just as soon never set foot near the place, but not I. I repeatedly begged Granddad to take me back, and one day, after many subsequent visits, he took me aside and said, "You should think about doing this kind of nursing yourself, Tracy. You've got a big heart and a lot of patience, just like your Nan."

That was just about the greatest compliment anyone had ever given me, and, as it turned out, Granddad was right. When I was eighteen, I went to nursing school, which in England is a five-and-a-half-year course. I didn't graduate at the top of the class—I admit, I was a last-minute crammer—but I really excelled in patient intervention. We call it "the practicals", which in England is a very important part of the coursework. I was so good at listening, observing, and displaying empathy that the Nursing School Board gave me the Nurse of the Year award, bestowed annually to the students who demonstrated outstanding patient care.

And so I became a registered nurse and midwife in England, specialising in children with physical and mental disabilities—children who often had no means of communication. Well, that's not quite true; like babies, they had their own way of conversing—a sort of nonverbal communication expressed through their cries and body language. To help them, I had to learn to understand their language and to become their interpreter.

# Cries and Whispers

Caring for newborns, many of whom I brought into the world, I came to realise that I could comprehend their nonverbal language, too. So when I went to America from England, I specialised in infant care, becoming a newborn and postpartum care giver, which Americans refer to as a baby nurse. I worked for couples in New York and Los Angeles, most of whom described me as a cross between Mary Poppins and the Daphne character on *Frasier*—apparently her accent, at least to American ears, sounds just like my Yorkshire burr. I showed these new mums and dads that they, too, could whisper to their babies: learn to hold back a bit and read their little ones and, once they knew what the problem was, calm them.

I shared with these mums and dads what I believe all parents should do for their babies: give them a sense of structure and help them become independent little beings. I also began to promote what I've come to call a whole-family approach—little ones need to become part of the family rather than the other way round. If the rest of the family—parents, siblings, even pets—is happy, then the baby will be content, too.

I feel very privileged when I'm invited into someone's home, because I know this is the most treasured time in parents' lives. It's a time when, along with the inevitable insecurities and the sleepless nights, mothers and fathers experience the greatest joy of their lives. As I watch their drama unfold and am called upon for help, I feel that I add to that joy because I help them step out of the chaos and relish the experience.

Nowadays, I sometimes live in with families, but more often I work as a consultant, dropping by for an hour or two over the first few days or weeks after the baby arrives. I meet lots of mothers and fathers in their thirties and forties, who are used to being in control of their

lives. When they become parents and are put in the uncomfortable position of being beginners, they sometimes wonder, “What have we done?” You see, whether a parent has a million pounds in the bank or two shillings in her purse, a newborn, especially a first baby, is the great equaliser. I’ve been with mums and dads from all walks of life, from people who are household names to those whose names are known only in their own neighbourhood. And let me assure you, having a baby brings out fear in the best of them.

Most times, in fact, my beeper goes off all day long (and sometimes in the middle of the night) with desperate calls such as these:

“Tracy, how come Chrissie seems hungry all the time?”

“Tracy, why does Jason smile at me one minute and burst out crying the next?”

“Tracy, I don’t know what to do. Joey’s been up all night, crying his head off.”

“Tracy, I think Rick is carrying the baby around too much. Would you tell him to stop?”

Believe it or not, after twenty-odd years of working with families, I can often diagnose problems over the phone, especially if I’ve already met the baby. Sometimes, I ask the mum to put the baby near the phone, so I can hear her crying.<sup>1</sup> (The mum is often crying, too.) Or I might pop in for a quick visit, and, if necessary, stay the night to observe what else is going on in the household that might be upsetting the baby or disrupting her routine. So far, I haven’t found a baby I don’t understand nor a problem I can’t make better.

## Respect: The Key to Unlocking a Baby’s World

My clients often say, “Tracy, you make it all look so easy.” The truth is, for me it *is* easy, because I connect with infants. I treat them as I would any human being: with respect. That, my friends, is the essence of the whispering I do.

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Every baby is a *person* who has language, feelings, and a unique personality—and, therefore, deserves respect.

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Respect is a theme you’ll hear throughout this book. If you remember to think of your baby as *a person*, you’ll always give her the respect she deserves. The dictionary definition of the verb is “to avoid violation or interference with”. How violated do *you* feel when someone speaks over or at you instead of *with* you, or touches you without your consent? When things are not explained correctly or when someone treats you with disregard, how angry or hurt do you feel?

It’s the same for a baby. People tend to speak over babies’ heads, sometimes acting as if the infant is not even there. I often hear parents or nannies say, “The baby did this” or “The baby did that”. That’s so impersonal and disrespectful; it’s as if they’re talking about an inanimate object. Even worse, they tug and pull at the sweet darling without a word of explanation, as if it’s an adult’s right to violate an infant’s space. That’s why I suggest drawing an imaginary boundary around your baby—a *circle of respect*, beyond which you cannot go without asking permission or telling your baby what you’re about to do (more about this in [Chapter 5](#)).

Even in the delivery room, I immediately call babies by their rightful names. I don’t think of that little being in the crib as “the baby”. Why not refer to an infant *by her*

*proper name*? When you do, you tend to think of her as the tiny person she is, not a helpless blob.

Indeed, whenever I initially meet a newborn, whether at the hospital, a few hours after he gets home, or weeks later, I always introduce myself and explain why I'm here. "Hi, Sammy", I say, looking into his big blue eyes. "I'm Tracy. I know you don't recognise my voice, because you don't know me yet. But I'm here to get to know you and to find out what you want. And I'm going to help your mummy and daddy understand what you're saying."

Sometimes a mum will say to me, "Why are you talking to him like that? He's only three days old. He can't possibly understand you."

"Well," I say, "we don't know that for sure, do we? Imagine how terrible it would be if he *does* understand me and I *don't* talk to him."

In the last decade especially, scientists have found out that newborns know more and understand more than we ever dreamed they did. Research confirms that babies are sensitive to sounds and smells and can tell the difference between one type of visual input and another. And their memories start to develop within the first few weeks of life. Therefore, even if little Sammy doesn't quite understand my words, he can surely *feel* the difference between someone who moves slowly and has a reassuring voice and someone who just breezes in and takes over. And if he does understand, he will know that right from the beginning, I'm treating him with respect.

## Whispering Isn't Just Talking

The secret of baby whispering involves remembering that your infant is always listening and, on some level, understands you. Now, virtually every book about child care tells parents, "Talk to your babies." That's not

enough. I tell parents, “Talk *with* your baby.” Your baby may not actually *talk* back, but he communicates by cooing, crying, and making gestures (more about decoding baby language in [Chapter 3](#)). Thus, you’re really having a *dialogue*, a two-way conversation.

Talking *with* your baby is another way of showing respect. Wouldn’t you converse with an adult you were caring for? When you first approached him, you would introduce yourself and explain what you were there to do. You’d be polite, peppering your conversation with “Please” and “Thank you” and “May I”. And you’d probably keep talking and explaining. Why not give the same consideration to your baby?

It’s also respectful to find out your baby’s likes and dislikes. As you will learn in [Chapter 1](#), some babies easily go with the flow, and others are more sensitive or contrary. Some also develop at a slower pace. To be truly respectful, we must accept our babies *as they are*, rather than compare them to a norm. (That’s why you won’t find any month-to-month descriptions in this book.) Your baby has a right to *his unique reactions* to the world around him. And the sooner you begin to have a dialogue with this precious being, the sooner you will understand who he is and what he wants from you.

I’m sure all parents want to encourage their children to become independent, balanced human beings whom they will respect and admire. But this starts in infancy; it’s not something you begin teaching when a child is fifteen, or even five. Remember, too, that parenting is a lifelong process and that, as a parent, you are a role model. By listening, and giving your baby respect, she will in turn grow up to be a person who listens and gives respect to others.

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If you take the time to observe your baby and to learn what she's trying to say to you, you're going to have a baby who's content and a family that isn't dominated by a distressed baby.

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Babies whose parents do the best they can to acknowledge and attend to their needs are secure babies. They don't cry when they're put down, because they feel safe on their own. They trust that their environment is a safe place—if they're troubled or in pain, someone will be there for them. Paradoxically, such babies ultimately need *less* attention and learn to play on their own more quickly than infants who are left to cry or whose parents consistently misread their cues. (By the way, it's normal to miss a *few* cues.)

## What Parents Need: Self-Confidence

It gives parents a sense of security to feel they know what they're doing. Sadly, the pace of modern living works against mums and dads, who often get caught up in their own hectic schedules. They don't realise they have to slow *themselves* down before trying to calm their baby. Part of my job, then, is getting Mum and Dad to slow down, tune in to their baby, and—just as important—listen to their own inner voice.

Regretfully, many parents today are victims of information overload. When they're expecting, they read magazines and books, do research, scour the Internet, listen to friends and family and specialists of all sorts. These are all valuable resources, but by the time the baby comes along, new parents are often more confused than when they started. Worse still, their own common sense has been drowned out by other people's ideas.

Granted, information is empowering—and in this book I intend to share with you all the tricks of my trade. But of all the tools I can give you, your own self-confidence about parenting will serve you best. To develop it, though, you have to figure out what works for you. Every baby is an individual, and so is every mum and dad. Hence every family's needs are different. What good would it do for me to tell you what I did with my own daughters?

The more you begin to see that you *can* understand and meet your baby's needs, the better you become at it. And I assure you, it *will* get easier. Every day I spend teaching parents how to be aware and how to communicate, not only do I see the baby's understanding and abilities grow, but I also see the parents themselves become more proficient and more confident.

## You *Can* Learn This from a Book!

Baby whispering *can* be learned. Indeed, most parents are amazed at how quickly they start to understand their babies *once they know what to look and listen for*. The real “magic” I perform is the reassurance I give new mums and dads. All new parents need a supportive figure, and that's where I come in. Most simply aren't prepared for the adjustment period, when there seem to be a million and one questions and no one around to answer them. I sort out their concerns. And I tell them, “Let's start with a plan.” I show them how to implement a structured routine, and then I show them everything else I know.

On a day-to-day basis, parenting is a tough, sometimes scary, constantly demanding, and often unrewarding job. I hope this book will help you to have a sense of humour about it all and, at the same time, give you a realistic



portrayal of what you're in for. Here's what you can expect from this book:

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## What Makes a Good Parent?

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In one of the infant-care books I skimmed, I read, "In order to be a good mother, you have to breastfeed." Rubbish! Parenting shouldn't be judged by how you feed or change your child's nappy or how you put your baby to sleep. Besides, we don't become good parents in the first weeks of a baby's life. Good parenting develops over *years*, as your children grow and you get to know them as individuals, which later encourages them to come to you for advice and support. However, the foundation of good parenting begins when you

- Are **respectful** of your baby
  - Know your baby as a **unique individual**
  - **Talk with**, not at, your baby
  - **Listen** and, when asked, meet your baby's needs
  - Let your baby know what's coming next by providing a daily dose of **dependability, structure, and predictability**
- 

- An understanding of what kind of baby you have and what you can expect from her temperament. In [Chapter 1](#), you'll find a checklist to help you see what particular challenges you might encounter.

- An understanding of your own temperament and adaptability. Life changes when Baby arrives, and it's

important to find out where you stand on what I call the Wing It/Plan It continuum ([Chapter 2](#))—whether you’re someone who normally flies by the seat of your pants or someone who likes to plan things down to the most minute detail.

- An explanation of my E.A.S.Y. plan, which helps give structure and routine to your day in this order: Eat, Activity, Sleep, Your time. E.A.S.Y. enables you to tend to your baby’s needs *and* rejuvenate your mind and body, whether by taking a nap, a hot bath, or a jaunt round the block. You’ll find an overview of E.A.S.Y. in [Chapter 2](#), and detailed discussions about what each of the letters stand for in [Chapters 4](#) through 7—4 is about eating; 5 about activities, 6 is about sleep issues, and 7 about what you can do to keep yourself physically *and* emotionally healthy and strong.
- Skills that will help you whisper to your baby—observe and understand what she’s trying to tell you, calm her when she’s upset ([Chapter 3](#)). I’ll help you hone your own powers of observation and self-reflection as well.
- The special circumstances that accompany unusual conceptions and deliveries, and the parenting issues that arise: when one adopts or uses a surrogate mother; when babies arrive early, have problems at birth, and/or can’t come home from the hospital right away; the joys and challenges of multiple births ([Chapter 8](#)).
- My Three-Day Magic ([Chapter 9](#)), a troubleshooting technique that can help you change bad patterns into beneficial ones. I will explain what I call “accidental parenting”, in which parents unwittingly reinforce negative behaviour in infants, and teach you my simple ABC strategy for analysing what went wrong.

I've tried to make this book fun to read, because I know that parents tend to use books about infants on an as-needed basis rather than plodding through them cover to cover. If they want to know about breastfeeding, they'll look in the index and read those pages only. If they're having sleep problems, they'll turn to the chapter on sleep. Given the demands of most parents' daily lives, I can understand that approach. However, in this case I urge you to read at least the first three chapters, which lay out my basic philosophy and approach. That way, even if you just read portions at a time of the remaining chapters of the book, you will understand my ideas and advice in the context of the larger issue of always treating your baby with the respect she deserves and, at the same time, not allowing her to take over your household.

Having a baby is by far the most life-changing event you'll ever experience—bigger than marriage or a new job or even the death of a loved one. Just the thought of having to adapt to a very different kind of life is scary. It's also very isolating. New parents often think they're the only ones who feel incompetent or have problems with breastfeeding. Women are sure that other mothers are instantly “in love” with their babies, and they wonder why they don't feel that way. Men are sure other fathers are more attentive. Unlike England, where a midwife, for the first ten days, and then a health visitor, if required, come to your home several times a week for the next two months, many new parents in America don't have anyone around to guide them through the early days.

Dear reader, I can't come into your living room, but I hope you'll hear my voice in this book and let me be a reassuring guide, doing for you what my Nan did for me when I was a young mother. You need to know that the sleep deprivation and your sense of being overwhelmed won't last forever and that, in the meantime, you're doing

the best you can. You need to hear that this happens to other parents, too, and that you'll get through it.

I hope that the philosophy and skills I share with you—my secrets—will wend their way into your head and heart. You might not have a smarter baby in the end (then again, you might), but you surely will have a happier, more confident one—without giving up your own life in the bargain. Perhaps most important, you'll feel better about your own parenting abilities. For I truly believe—and have seen firsthand—that inside every new mum and dad lies a caring, confident, and competent parent—a baby whisperer in the making.

1. Throughout this book, when I talk about a baby, the pronouns *he* and *she* are alternated to give a balanced representation of gender.

## CHAPTER ONE

# Loving the Baby You Gave Birth To

I just can't get over how much babies cry. I really had no idea what I was getting into. To tell you the truth, I thought it would be more like getting a cat.

—Anne Lamott in

*Operating Instructions*

## Oh My God, We Have a *Baby*!

No event in an adult's life equals both the joy *and* the terror of becoming a parent for the first time. Fortunately, it's the joy that carries on. But in the beginning, insecurity and fear often take over. Alan, for example, a thirty-three-year-old graphic designer, vividly remembers the day he picked up his wife, Susan, from the hospital. Coincidentally, it was their fourth anniversary. Susan, a writer, age twenty-seven, had had a fairly easy labour and birth, and their beautiful blue-eyed baby, Aaron, nursed easily and rarely cried. By day two, Mum and Dad were eager to leave the hubbub of the hospital to start life as a family.

"I whistled as I walked down the hall towards her room", Alan recalls. "Everything seemed perfect. Aaron had nursed right before I got there, and now he was sleeping in Susan's arms. It was just as I imagined it would be. We went down in the lift, and the nurse let me wheel Susan out into the sunlight. When I ran for the car door, I realized I'd forgotten to set up the infant seat. I swear it took me half an hour to get it in right. Finally, I gently slid Aaron in. He was such an angel. I helped Susan into the car, thanked the nurse for her patience, and then climbed into the driver's seat.

"Suddenly, Aaron started making little noises from the backseat—not really crying, but sounds I didn't recall hearing in the hospital or maybe hadn't noticed. Susan looked at me, and I looked at her. 'Oh, Jesus!' I exclaimed. 'What do we do *now*?'"

Every parent I know has a what-now moment like Alan's. For some it comes in the hospital; for others it