

# Parenting two in 2022



THE DOCTOR IS IN  
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I was about to sit down and write this column, when the paper arrived with my colleague's column on psychological tips for new parents.

It was perfect timing, as I just spent three weeks "on vacation" in a three-bedroom "in vivo laboratory" consisting of we grandparents, the two parents on parental leave for the duration of our visit and more, a very busy gifted four-year-old big sister and a tiny, very hungry newborn.

I not only survived, but thrived in this oasis, which, given the situation was so calm and relaxing, I felt merited intensive study.

You see, I once specialized in infant psychology, and have written a column and lectured on "When baby makes three," but these past weeks were a wonderful reminder of just how special this time can be with a new baby.

We literally saw daily changes in this precious little bundle, as she went from arriving almost fetal-like to having grown into a one-month-old who could track our faces and voices, express her opinions loudly on a wide variety of subjects, charm her big sister for long periods of time, and more.

How quickly we were brought back into the world of sleep, poop, nurse and cry, but what was additionally very special was to witness the way our own children parented. They were amazing.

The world, post-COVID, is in many ways very different from what it once was, and compared to when we had our children. Siri and Alexa enter conversations almost as family members, giving reminders, playing lullabies, timing feedings and more. Groceries and just about everything else, too, can be ordered on the spot and arrive at the door in as little as 15 minutes.

While our children were beyond exhausted, it appeared that the general house rules they adopted even before child No. 2 arrived stood them in good stead for this major disruption in their lives.

## *Consistency and love are the two critical ingredients*

Here are a few observations.

1. While rules are super important, it is even more crucial to follow them. This is important not only for the big people who are role models, but definitely for the little ones as well. Big sister was given instructions as to where and how she could hold the baby and just where on the baby she could touch her safely. They lovingly told her all that she could do, and how the baby would enjoy it, and explained gently what would and would not be okay for the baby in terms of food or touch.

2. Consistency and love are the two critical ingredients that work together to promote a sense of calm. For example, it's a given that bedtime for the oldest is by 7:30 p.m., and this includes a good night story, some prayers, a chat and more. Breakfast (with a choice of healthy options) is followed by minimally assisted dressing, teeth brushing, sunscreen, shoes and masking up prior to day camp. Arrival home means the mask is hung up (at eye level), shoes are removed, hands get washed, and once she completes these tasks, she is rewarded with delicious family time while sharing excitedly her stories about her day.

3. Everything in the apartment has a home. There is a place for the four-year-old's toys (which she puts away, mostly by herself, every day) and the endless stuff that goes along with a tiny baby. Always, no matter how exhausted people are before bedtime, they spend five minutes to ensure the apartment is in order. Surfaces are cleared of clutter that has accrued during the day, the table and counters are sprayed and wiped, boxes are broken down, and garbage is bagged. "Chewy,"



IT WAS a wonderful reminder of just how special this time can be with a new baby. (Laura Ohlman/Unsplash)

the robot vacuum, cleans the general dust overnight, and everyone awakes to a sense of orderliness in which to start the day.

4. The apartment is relatively quiet, despite loud air-conditioning and street noise. This is not because there is a baby, as no one attempts to lower their voice. Cell-phones, however, are always on vibrate, so there are no annoying pings and bings. While adults are on their phones, it is not excessive. Television is not just left "on in the background." If videos are watched, they are educational, and an adult is often sitting close by.

5. No one seems to yell. If the four-year-old does something wrong, they discipline quickly and with consistency. In general, things are patiently explained in terms of what was done, what is the expected behavior; and when there are temper tantrums, appropriate choices of action are offered. The message is simple, clear and unified between parents.

One day the four-year-old insisted on going for a walk in very warm outdoor temperatures, with not a cloud in the sky, wearing her rain boots and coat, carrying

an umbrella. The parents knew how to pick their battles, give in on the small stuff and maintain a sense of humor.

6. Mealtime is seen as a special opportunity to attempt to eat together. As difficult as this can be with a newborn, in general meals have a nice sense of flow. Everyone cooperates getting the food on the table, helping with preparation and cleanup. The meal train concept, with friends offering to bring meals, or a choice of "dining in from restaurants" is very helpful, and friends in the know enjoy participating. There is enjoyable conversation, and everyone happily participates, even if someone is rocking or feeding the baby at the same time. Meals are remarkably healthful and child-friendly. At times, when the baby is being nursed, big sister will sit on the couch next to Mom and feed her dolly as well.

7. There is a general feeling of goodwill that permeates the apartment. If one makes coffee, they offer it to the other. "What would you like?" "How can I help? Do you want to take a nap, you're so tired?" are frequently murmured between the couple, which is lovely to hear and not a given, with the stress they are under. People generally get up to help, and even big sister helps with setting the table, entertaining, cleaning and more.

8. While we grandparents made certain to try and keep a good balance of helping out but not taking over or being in the way, we also got out to ensure the parents had private family time. Parents and baby tried to get out for a short daily walk, and one evening they even managed a short date while we babysat.

HAVING A new baby is both exciting and challenging. No matter how prepared you think you are, these are times when your life will feel out of control. The difficult moments will pass, although it is hard to believe that such a tiny baby could rule your life. Between feeding, soothing, hormonal changes and exhaustion, you may find the early months a blur.

Schedule some essential "me" time as a priority. Make time to be together as a couple, as this creates the foundation for a strong family.

Set your priorities, have realistic expectations, and allow others to help out. If your friend comes for a two-hour visit, saying "kick me out when you want me to leave," let them know how exhausted you are and that you are up to only a 20-minute visit this week.

New parents are beyond tired, and while some new moms are comfortable nursing in front of others, many initially are not.

Finally, remember to take it one day or even one hour at a time. It does get easier. If you are having trouble coping, make sure that you get help. Otherwise, enjoy your little treasures, as before you know it, you'll wonder how those years flew by so quickly. ■

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