

The Magic Years

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New introduction by Dr. T Berry Brazelton, renowned pediatrician

- Written around developmental stages, with three major sections: The First Eighteen Months, Eighteen Months to Three Years, and Three Years to Six.
- This would have been a great book for me to read raising my children who were born in the 70s; she addresses the problems at each stage of development with researched insight, humility, and humor; her advice is practical and, in hind sight, true.
- These are magic years because the child in his early years is a magician, in the psychological sense. The child believes that his actions and thoughts can bring about events.
- But, a magic world is an unstable world and the authors spends a significant part of the next 290+ pages citing real case examples of how that unstable world impacts both the child AND the parent/caregiver.
- Parents need to know that that there is no way in which children can be reared without experiencing anxiety. It is the way in which the child manages his irrational fears that determined their effect upon his personality development.
- Mental health depends upon the maintenance of a balance within the personality between the basic human urges and egocentric wishes on the one hand and the demands of conscience and society on the other. Unbalance, you have anxiety, and according to the author that is quite prevalent, at least through age 2-3.

- When we better understand the importance of imagination and intellect for mental health we can draw certain inferences for child rearing.
- THE FIRST EIGHTEEN MONTHS:
- In the earliest weeks we can see how physical contact with the mother or father represents protection to the baby.
- Babies deprived of maternal care are demonstrably more irritable, more easily shocked throughout their infancy than babies who have known mothering.
- Why does a baby smile: the pleasure, the satisfaction of nursing become associated with the human face. By six-eight months the child has finally linked the mother's face with the satisfaction of his needs and regards her as the source of satisfaction.
- It is the mother, the primary source of satisfaction in early infancy, who represents "the world" and it is through this attachment that he discovers himself and the world outside.
- A baby under nine months doesn't have the slightest notion that an object has an independent existence, that it exists whether he sees it or not. When the object disappears from view it ceases to exist.
- And soon independent locomotion begins and then the ties to the mother's body are loosened. The discovery of independent locomotion and the discovery of a new self, usher in a new phase in personality development.
- "From dawn to dusk he marches in an ecstatic, drunken dance, which ends only when he collapses with fatigue." Somewhere between eight and fifteen months they sell him on the novelty and greater convenience of a cup over the breast or bottle. "The missionaries are on hand to interfere with a rapidly growing list of simple pleasures."

- Good parents will manage with or without a knowledge of the theory of child development. “But with such knowledge I believe that the job of rearing a child can be made easier.” The unease, the uncertainty and anxiety which is experienced by even the best of parents when presented with a child’s incomprehensible behavior can be alleviated at least in part by such knowledge.
- Activity Brings Problems: A mother is glad that her child is developing so well and beginning to show his independence – “but it was so much neater when mama did the feeding.”
- Outdoor play space is a necessity at this age and if there is no yard adjacent to the home the city’s parks or tot lots will provide a decent substitute and it will be well worth the trouble to a busy mother if time can be arranged each day for outdoor activity.
- FROM EIGHTEEN MONTHS TO THREE YEARS:
- Your child the magician: “Whatever a magician believes, the truth of the matter is that he derives his power from his audience. The career of a magician ends in the moment that his audience disbelieves his magic.”
- Mama, repeated several times, “will magically cause the appearance of the invaluable woman who ministers to all needs and guards him against all evil.” He, of course, attributes this to his magic powers.
- “So we need to say that the science of the toddler is unreliable because his theories of causality are still rooted in magic. The belief that human activity is the cause of all things, is only an extension of the child’s infantile, egocentric belief that he or his activity is the cause of all things.”
- The child holds the love of his parents more dearly than anything. “To be fair about it, he also loves himself very much and this

conflict between self-love and love of others is the source of much of his difficulty at this age.”

- The building of a conscience: Physical development follows a definite and predictable path toward maturation. “But social development, the acquisition of standards of behavior, the restriction of impulses and urges, will not develop without teaching. The little child will not acquire control over his impulse unless we require him to.”
- It is love for his parents and the value he places on parental approval or disapproval that largely influences his conduct.
- If the parent is to be effective in teaching control he must not permit his relationship with the child to deteriorate into a state of war. Then all teaching is blocked.
- THREE YEARS TO SIX:
- Toward the Age of Reason: The child wants proof for everything; “how do you know if something is true if you don’t see it?”
- The differences between the “God Fantasy” at three and the “Utopia” at six are not simply the differences in intellectual equipment of three and six. The differences must be credited to the civilizing process that takes place between three and six.
- When you begin to see qualities like human empathy, identification,, love that transcends love of self, the high valuation of life, and the moral revulsion against acts that seek destruction “are not innate in human nature but are the products of family education in the earliest years.”
- During this time, the child wants to know how things are made; the most fascinating problem of all is how he was made and where he came from. When told he comes from a tiny egg, the question is “how tiny?” He is skeptical; even the stork story makes more sense than this to a four or five year old!

- “For children, even the children of the most enlightened parents, have difficulty in grasping the idea that their parents have a sexual life.”
- There is a chapter entitled “Education For Love,” which covers the parental dilemma of how much discussion is too much . . . or too little. “How far should the child’s curiosity be satisfied?” She has specific case studies on giving sex information to children of this age and the differences between how a little girl vs. a little boy processes that information. Finally, the role of the father: “We have a hard time in our culture defining the role of the father in a democratic society. A father need not be a playmate for his son and a father must reserve a good-sized place in the relationship to his son for the exercise of parental authority when the occasion demands it.”
- That achievements of psychoanalysis permit professionals to reconstruct a child’s history, to examine his personality in light of that history, and to be able to say “this is how this child’s personality is made; this is why he is what he is.” But she reminds us that neither psychoanalysis nor any other kind of psychology can predict the further course of personality development. As she summarized: “So we cannot predict. We try.”
- In the final paragraph, she concludes: “It appears that parents need not be paragons; they be inexperienced, they may be permitted to err in the fashion of the species, to employ sometimes a wrong method or an unendorsed technique, and still have an excellent chance of rearing a healthy child IF the bonds between the parent and child are strong and provide the incentives for growth and development in the child.”

Craig Knutson, 6.20.16