



newsletter for nurturing support groups

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The Art of Becoming

Becoming who we truly are capable of becoming in the fullest sense could be called the journey of life. Such an on-going, ever-expanding art eludes a tight description and perhaps can only be hinted at as the art of simultaneously being and becoming.

A person who is adept at the art of becoming practices that art in the here and now; she continues to *be* as she continues to *become*. The person who is adept at becoming will not always be described as happy but will often handle both the joy and the pain of life with acceptance and grace. She will be glad she is alive, and sure that she belongs, that she has a rightful place on this earth. She will accept and attend to her own needs as well as to the needs of others. She will appreciate her own uniqueness. She will be willing to grow through each day, neither living in the future nor longing for the past. She will trust the wisdom of her current stage of growth as part of a life-long journey, even when she doesn't understand "why this now?" She will have learned to trust her own feelings and be willing to entertain new ways of thinking, to entertain dichotomous ideas without losing her own direction. She does not believe in magic but welcomes the support of synchronicity, those meaningful coincidences of life. She will find her spiritual source and hold a solid love for herself and for others.

Look now at the infant—how can we help her on her life-long path of becoming? It is, after all, *her* path. But adults can help—by providing the setting, the atmosphere and the process that will invite this new bundle of possibility called infant to start incorporating the very set of beliefs that are described above for the adult. By touch, voice, care and surroundings we can affirm her very being:

Affirmations for Being

- I'm glad you are alive.
- You belong here.
- What you need is important to me.
- I'm glad you are you.
- You can grow at your own pace.
- You can feel all of your feelings.
- I love you and I care for you willingly.

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the 51st issue of **WE**, a newsletter for and about groups of people who get together for the purpose of giving each other personal support, examining attitudes, and learning new skills.

This issue focuses on the art of becoming, on the new life of the infant and on the new life and hope that we all need to find within ourselves each day.

Some of you may already be using the audio cassette tape, "The Important Infants," a day in the life of Matthew and Mara. In this **WE** you will find suggested ways to use the tape as an aid in the art of becoming. There is a transcript of the tape including the tape's letter which you are invited to copy and use as a handout sheet.

Courage,

Jean Illsley Clarke, Editor

The infant who receives these messages is a lucky baby!

And what of those of us who were not so lucky? We who grew up in places where there was not enough of something and where adults' energies were put or had to be put in areas that did not support our being? We can get those messages now. We can accept those beliefs for ourselves, moving from the skepticism of a brief glance or a gingerly touch to a full embrace. We need not move too quickly or expect overnight success, but we are all on our life journey so we may as well be on it intentionally.

We can use the activities described here to help us do that.

The Important Infants

Well, here I am. At least I think that I am..? That is my biggest job for my first six months—to decide to be and to decide that I can be me and can connect with other people.

Today I feel pretty sure about it. My Mom and I played this morning. She hugged me and I squirmed. I cooed and she cooed back. She talked in her high, sing-songy voice, the one I love, and I smiled at her. She smiled at me a lot and held me and held her head at that little angle like she does when she is really looking into my eyes and loving me. She is so special—my Mom. Then my Dad held me the way he does. He holds me up firmer and expects me to look at him and laugh. I often do. I like my Dad a lot too.

Dad said, "Baby Matthew, you will stay with Mrs. Osbourne today while your Mom and I are at work. We will put your sweater on you and go in the car."

Mrs. Osbourne is my child care lady and she knows lots about babies. She has a smooth crib for me and Mom brings my own blanket. That's cause Mrs. Osbourne told Mom smell is very important to babies and she wanted me to have smells from home while I get used to her house. Mrs. Osbourne watches me and my Mom very closely to see if she thinks we are "bonding." She says it is easier to care for babies who are forming close bonds with their parents because those babies have more skill in relating to her. I don't know what "bonding" is but Mrs. O. says we are doing it. She says it is clear to her that my folks and I care a lot about each other and Mrs. O. says she likes me a lot too.

Before my folks leave me they tell me "Good-bye" and that they will come back for me in the afternoon. Sometimes I ignore them and sometimes I screech, but they always tell me. I like that. They don't ever sneak out on me.

I remember the first day that I came to Day Care. Mrs O. just looked right at me for the first few minutes. She looked like she really liked me and she wanted to see my eyes. Then she watched my Mom and me together. She says every baby has it's own rhythm and when the Mom has adjusted to the baby's rhythm Mrs. O. can get clues from both the Mom and the baby about how the baby likes to be handled. Mrs. O. seemed to care a lot about what I wanted and what I liked, but she didn't seem to be in a hurry for me to like her. She said, "Baby Matthew will decide if he likes me. We will leave that up to him."

She gave me special time and attention. She changed my diaper slowly and gently and told me what she was doing. And when she gave me my bottle, she didn't let other people interrupt us. If the other kids tried to push in, she said, "I will take care of you in a few minutes. You can stay here by us, but this is Baby Matthew's time and I am paying attention to him now."

We play eyes and smiling games while I drink my milk. Sometimes she smiles first and sometimes I do. I like it when she gives her great big smile. I'm learning how to smile like that.

Mrs. O. holds me other times besides when I am having my bottle. Of course, she picks me up when I cry. She helps me out however I need it. Clean diapers, a bottle, some hugs and kisses, a little talk and movement—some rocking or jiggling or walking. She tries things out 'til she figures out what I need. Sometimes Mrs. O. picks me up when I'm not crying or asking. She says she does that because she loves me and I'm important to her. Sometimes I arch or snuggle and make a lot of noise. I feel how good it is to push and kick and wiggle. She says, "Baby Matthew is active right now." Other times I am very still. I enjoy how good it is to feel Mrs. O.'s soft body and her arms around me and I listen to the delicious gurgley sounds in her body.

I was inside of my Mom for nine months you know. That is much longer than I have been outside and sometimes I get lonesome for Mom's heart beat and all those friendly gurgles. When I am quiet Mrs. O. says, "Baby Matthew is quiet now." But she lets me choose whether I want to be active or quiet and when I want to stop. She says that adults shouldn't make babies play when they don't want to.

Here is what I like most about Mrs. Osbourne:
She likes me!

She likes that I'm a boy, and she likes that I am a baby—just the age I am.

She doesn't want me to hurry and grow up but she likes it that I'm growing a little bit every day. Whatever I need she helps me with.

She is on my side and she thinks I'm important!

When I first stayed with Mrs. O. I wasn't a bit sure about the whole thing so I avoided her. When she tried to look at me, I turned my head away or looked away or just gazed through her as if she wasn't there. She said, "Oh, Baby Matthew is avoiding me. Well, I'll let him take his time." So she touched me very gently and talked nice to me when she was holding me. She even talked softly to me every time she came near my crib, which was pretty often. But she didn't try to force me or to trick me into looking at her. Pretty soon I started to sneak little peeks and now I like looking at her a lot.

Our days are pretty full. Mrs. O. has all those other kids to care for. She lets them talk with me and touch me when they are gentle. And if they make a sudden noise that scares me she picks me up and comforts me





and tells me what it was.

But even when Mrs. O. is busy with kids or resting she keeps a special part of her ear listening for me. She says infants are important and you can learn to hear when they need you.

Sometimes I get cholice. I hate it. I scream and scream and arch my back and my face gets red. Mrs. O. checks to be sure that I'm not hungry or wet or that my clothing isn't uncomfortable. Then she says, "Well, there is nothing more I know to do. Baby Matthew has cholice." She carries me around on one arm while I scream and she goes calmly about her work. I don't act at all as if I appreciate it, but I do. Cholice is the pits! Sometimes she asks someone else to carry me around for a while. When Mr. O. carries me he walks real bumpy. I like that and I usually stop crying somewhat, but I start again when the bumping stops and I cry till my bout with cholice is over.

When Mrs. O. sees one of my folks coming to get me, she tells me that my Mom or Dad is here and that I will be going home now. That is a special time. Although I like Mrs. O., I like my folks the best thing in the whole world! Before I leave, Mrs. O. catches my eye and smiles and tells me good-bye and that she will see me again soon."

And she will. I come here often. I like Mrs. O. a lot and so do my folks. My Dad said that some people haven't had the chance to learn how important infants are and how to treat them. He told Mrs. Osbourne that she should write a letter telling people what infants need. She said she'd think about it and that she would ask me what to put in the letter. You can read it if you want to. But just remember, you can listen to infants and think and feel inside of yourself how to treat important infants and how to help them decide to BE, to grow, to live and to connect with other people. (The letter is on page 5.)

by Jean Illsley Clarke

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

To Use The Important Infant Tape For Your Own Growth

Parenting Skills - Listen and Learn

To improve your parenting skills, listen to the tape or read the article early in the morning. Identify with the care givers. Remember that the story includes a mom, a dad and a child care provider because those are the people who provide most of the child care. You can think of each of them as a loving adult and you can learn from each of them how to offer love and care.

Listen every morning for three weeks or until you are aware that you are providing love and care that works, and that you are proud of. Don't worry about feeling comfortable or natural and don't worry about spoiling your infant. Children who were loved a lot as infants are less demanding or/and less withdrawn later on. Refer back to the article or tape whenever you need a boost. Post the Affirmations for Being and say, read or sing them to your infant every day.

Personal Growth - Program Dream Time

To improve your ability to accept and love your own essence or the being part of you, listen to the tape or read the article just before you go to sleep. Identify with the child. In this way you program your natural dreaming-healing time to incorporate the loving, supportive messages within yourself.

Continue this activity for two or three weeks or until you feel yourself being more clear about your right to be alive and to be learning from whatever part of your life journey you are on right now. If you didn't get some of these messages the first time around, find someone to help you grieve those losses so you can be more open to taking in these health-giving messages now. After you stop listening to the tape, say the Affirmations for Being to yourself every night. Return to the story for a boost whenever you need it.

- Thanks to Gail Nordeman for suggesting these ways of listening.

To Use the Important Infant Tape In Your Family

For Adults and Teenagers

Listen to the tape with the other adults or teenagers who care for your children.

- Each person list what you know or guess about how your parents responded to you as an infant.
- Notice that each item on the list describes a way that you will probably respond to an infant unless you have intentionally decided to respond differently.
- Read the Affirmations for Being (on page 1) to each other. Discuss ways you can offer them to the infant and to each other.
- One of the infant's tasks is to learn to ask for help. Discuss how well each of you asks directly for help. Identify ways you can practice asking for help directly as you support your infant. Each person think of one thing you might do instead of asking for help. For example:
 - Saying, "I'm tired."
 - Sighing.
 - Acting strong when you are feeling vulnerable.
 - Feeling victimized or martyred.

Activities *continued*

Then each person practice asking for help directly by reading the following list aloud several times:

- "Will you please help me?"
- "Will you clean the kitchen tonight?"
- "Will you hold the baby for 20 minutes?"
- "Will you care for the children while I nap for an hour?"

To Use the Important Infant Tape In Groups

Read the article or listen to the tape and hand out copies of the *Dear Child Care Providers* letter (on page 5) and a list of the Affirmations for Being (on page 1). If you are working with a group that is not primarily child care providers, change the greeting to Dear Mom, or Dear Dad, or Dear Foster Parent, or Dear Babysitter, or whatever is appropriate for your group.

From the following list, choose activities that you think will be helpful to the group or duplicate the list and invite the group members to select activities.

Ask people to:

- Identify which words and behaviors described in the tape offered each affirmation from the list of the Affirmations for Being.
- Mark each item on the letter with a W, "This I do well" or with a B, "This I could do better." Ask people, in pairs, to celebrate what they "do well" and give each other suggestions for the "how to do better" items.
- List the rules in your house (or child care center) that offer protection to infants. Rewrite any rules that you think need improvement.
- Identify specific behaviors that the adults used in reference to each item in the letter. For each item,

identify an alternative behavior to the one used that would also be helpful.

- Identify common behaviors of infants. List each under "Enjoy" or "Take Action." Under each "Enjoy" item list specific ways you let the infant know that you enjoy that behavior. Under each "Take Action" item list specific behaviors you can use to take action.
- Do a Suggestion Circle on how to enjoy or take action on any item on the list. (For directions for running a Suggestion Circle see **WE**, Vol. 5, or any of the Help! for Parents books, Jean Illsley Clarke, et al.)
- Do the suggested activities described under "To Use The Important Infant Tape In Your Family - Adults and Teenagers."

For Older Children

To Help Older Children Understand the Infant

Ask the older siblings and their playmates to listen to the tape to:

- Learn about the job of an infant.
- Learn not to take the baby's demands and interruptions personally.
- Remember that, in a healthy infant, this stage will only last a short time if she gets good love and care from the family.

To Help Older Children Strengthen Their Own Sense of Being

Make the tape available for older children to play whenever they want to.

It is important to remember that if any of us didn't complete a developmental task the first time around, we always have another chance. Older children can listen to the tape to help them accept that they were lovable infants like Mara and Matthew and that they did have or deserved to have wonderful care.

Opening Activity For Celebrating New Life

Hand out name tags.

Ask each person to:

- Choose a partner.
- Make a name tag for him and ask him to tell you a story that he has heard about his birth or infancy.
- Introduce your partner and tell the group one thing about his birth or infancy if he is willing for you to share that information.

Closing Activity About Caring

At the end of the meeting, briefly review the activities of the meeting.

- Ask several people to share what they think is the single most important way to care for an infant (or for themselves).
- Ask for Resentments. Listen to resentments, do not defend or explain.
- Ask for Appreciations.
- Ask the group to read the following affirmation to themselves, and then to join you in reading if they want to: "When we were infants we needed total care. Now we are older. Our life-long growing-up job is to care for others, to learn to take ever better care of ourselves and to ask for appropriate care from others."

An Important Infant

Dear Child Care Provider,

Please **love me**.

Please **attempt to make an attachment with me in the first few seconds that I see you**, but please let me be in charge of how fast I attach to you.

Please **talk and sing to me, touch me, move me and cuddle me**.

Please **remember** that I can cry and smile and cling and suck and follow with my eyes to signal you and **it is up to you to figure out what I need and give it to me**.

Please **arrange to have enough time for me**. Stimulating toys and mobiles and pictures don't do it for me. I can only learn how to be responsive to people by practicing with empathetic people.

Please **feed me when I holler or root for food**, but please **don't feed me when I am not hungry or when I have not asked**. Feeding me when I am not hungry helps me be passive and not know what I need. Letting me cry until the clock says it is time to feed me teaches me that I am powerless, that I can't get my needs met.

Please **remember** that in order for me to develop my ability to smile socially in response to other people, **I must be able to see your face and to see you smile at me**.

Please **balance my activity**. Too little stimulation is not good for me and too much jostling and patting are tiring to me. I am far too little to be tossed in the air.

Please **help me learn how to make contact with you, and how to end contact with you**. When I get tired I need to know how to stop our conversation.

I need to learn to trust other people so then I can trust myself and my world. You help me do that by **doing what you say you will do**.

Don't sweet talk me when you are mad. I like it better if you **say you are mad and take time to cool down**.

Please **talk to me in that high, sing-song voice** and remember that I **like those exaggerated facial expressions** that you use when you talk with me.

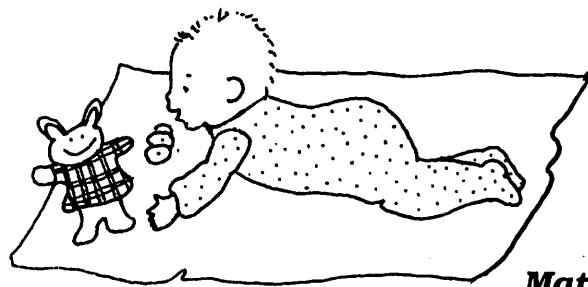
Above all, please **love me and pay attention to me**. I am practicing the art of **becoming** and I need your help.

Love,

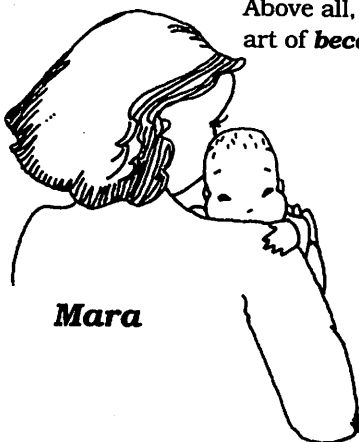
Your Important Infant Friend

To order *The Important Infants*, send \$5.95 per tape plus \$1.50 handling to: **Daisy Tapes, 16535 9th Avenue No., Minneapolis, MN 55447**, or call during business hours (612)473-1840. Minnesota residents please add 6% tax.

Other tapes available from Jean Illsley Clarke are *The Wonderful Busy Ones* (6 to 18 months) and *The Terrific Twos* (18 months to 3 years). Send \$15.00 for a set of three tapes plus \$2.00 handling.



Matthew



Mara

Suggested Format for Group Meetings

Place _____

Date _____

Time _____

Person in Charge _____

Program:

- Opening activity that offers everyone a positive personal message
- Ground rules
- Celebrate wins and share problems
- Ask for support
- Practice skills, new learnings, play
- Suggestion Circle
- Plan the next meeting
- Resentments and Appreciations
- Closing activity that offers everyone a positive personal message



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Led by Jean Illsley Clarke

Write to **WE** for details.

Edited by Jean Illsley Clarke
Designed by Marnie Lilja Baehr

WE

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• Ideas and activities or
materials to use individually
or in support groups.

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