

# Changing Trends in Parenting

## Good Beginnings of the Upper Valley looks back at 25 years of parenting.

BY DENISE DAME | PHOTOGRAPHY BY AMY CHAN

It's hard to believe that I've been parenting almost as long as Good Beginnings has been providing in-home support to families with new babies. I admit this with some reluctance and disbelief. Yes, indeed, it's been that long since my oldest son was born via Cesarean section one fine morning all those years ago. Over the years, I've witnessed many stories about babies and parenting, many with common threads. But I've also noticed changing trends in parenting which have come to light over the last eight years that I've been working for Good Beginnings — first as the coordinator of volunteers and now as the executive director.

Admittedly, there's an age difference between me and the new mothers (and fathers) who call the office for assistance. But this just means that I am uniquely positioned to compare and contrast particular details, and there are many commonalities that remain true:

- Becoming a parent changes everything.
- Labor is still very hard work.
- As prepared as one feels for the arrival of the new bundle of joy, there are still things to figure out.
- Every baby is different. I have yet to meet a woman who believes that all of her babies were the same!

But what has changed is noticeable from the very beginning. When my new bundle of joy arrived, we

called family and friends (by plug-in-the-wall telephone, not cell phone or Skype) to announce his birth and eventually mailed out birth announcements (by U.S.P.S., not via e-mail, tweets or Facebook).

Technology has changed so many aspects of our lives and parenting is no exception.

We now have access to tons of information

from a variety of sources — from the American Academy of Pediatrics to Zero to Three. (Good Beginnings lists a few resource links on its website at [www.goodbeginnings.net](http://www.goodbeginnings.net), under the "Parents" tab.) With my first child, there was no World Wide Web. I relied upon my doctor's office staff and various libraries. In today's world, the information superhighway has changed everything from the way we obtain information to the way we disseminate information like birth announcements and photos of our precious, new little ones.



More dads are on duty these days.

Numerous other changes I've seen have to do with baby paraphernalia. When my son became mobile, I relied heavily upon a playpen, the Johnny Jump Up, and a walker I used in the areas of my home with bare wooden floors. For those new to the term, a "Johnny Jump Up" was a little baby swing with springs that clamped above the upper part of a door casing. I used mine in the doorway between the dining room and kitchen. He would jump, swing and squeal with delight for 15 to 20 minutes while I prepared lunch or dinner.

## Pregnancy and Parenting Classes

The Women's Health Resource Center, on the Mall in Lebanon, has a wide array of childbirth and breastfeeding classes, CPR and first aid training, and sibling and fatherhood classes. Here are some of the other classes we are offering...

### A TIME TO BE BORN

**Mondays, Jan 9 – 30  
or Feb 27 – Mar 19 ■ 6 – 8:30 p.m.**

\$125/couple for four classes  
*Suzanne Greeley or Holly Maher, Certified Childbirth Educators*

### ANOTHER TIME AROUND

**Jan 8 or Mar 14 ■ 6 – 9 p.m.**

\$40/couple  
*Suzanne Greeley, Certified Childbirth Educator*

### HELLO BROTHER/HELLO SISTER

**Jan 28 or Mar 24 ■ 10 – 11:30 a.m.**

\$15/family  
*Suzanne Greeley, Certified Childbirth Educator and Lactation Consultant*

### BIRTH ART WORKSHOP

**Sunday, February 5 ■ 1:30 – 3 pm**

\$25 for the class/person or couple  
*Shuba Srinivasan*

### SURVIVAL SKILLS FOR DADS

**Thursday, Mar 29 ■ 6 – 8:30 p.m.**

\$30 for class and materials  
*Matt Maher, father of three and husband of Holly Maher, Childbirth Educator*

### TAKING CARE OF BABY: PARENT-BABY CONNECTION BIRTH TO SIX MONTHS

**Wednesday, Feb 15 ■ 6 – 8:30 p.m.**

Auditorium E ■ \$40/person or couple  
*Suzanne Greeley, Certified Childbirth Educator and Lactation Consultant*

### BREASTFEEDING, THE BEST START

**Jan 4 or Mar 7 ■ 6:30 – 8:30 pm**

\$40/person or couple  
*Suzanne Greeley, Certified Lactation Consultant*

WOMEN'S HEALTH RESOURCE CENTER  
**Dartmouth-Hitchcock**

Call 603-650-2600 for more information,  
to register for a class, or sign up for  
our free newsletter.

Nowadays, the playpen seems to have all but disappeared. When I was working as the coordinator of volunteers, I remember a rather surprised volunteer asking me during a volunteer meeting, "What happened to all of the playpens?" Women used them as "safe havens" when they had to run downstairs to transfer the laundry from the washer to the dryer or for other such short-term, necessary absences from the part of the house where baby was sitting and playing. Parents seemed to have stopped using them. One parent shared with a volunteer that they seem like little prisons and she just couldn't bear to use one.

## Numerous other changes I've seen have to do with baby paraphernalia.

The plethora of products available to new parents astounds me. There are baby carriers for the front, on the back, and in various colors, styles, sizes and weight capacities. Strollers have as many bells and whistles as some motor vehicles do these days. No wonder it's nearly impossible to find "the right one." And then there are diaper systems, baby wipe warmers, musical mobiles and baby motion seats (batteries required!). Baby swings are still swings, but much more elaborate and they can also stay in seemingly endless motion should you possess the correct batteries.

Many of the product changes that I've seen over the years were driven by safety concerns. Take the baby walker, for instance. Babies could propel themselves with their tiny little legs and feet and sail around the house pretty swiftly. It wasn't unheard of for baby to bounce off the corner of the sofa or run into the dog. The problem with these seemingly wonderful

devices: stairs. No more walkers!

Baby cribs have also changed in their design and usage over the years. The most notable change is the reduction in the distance between slats to prevent babies from getting caught, especially their heads. Usage of the crib has changed in response to an increased incidence in sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). Now mattresses are firm with minimal bedding (fitted sheets only), no soft objects inside or over the crib, and baby is put to sleep on its back. Between product design changes and parent/caregiver behavioral changes, sleep environments are much safer for babies in recent years.

It would be remiss of me not to mention some observations about parents themselves. The two most notable changes over the last quarter of a century relate to discipline and fatherhood. I've enjoyed witnessing the increased involvement of fathers in the day-to-day care of babies in particular. In concert with the baby's mother, the two parents can work together to even the workload, support one another, and have more time to experience the joys of parenting, and each other! ■

Denise Dame grew up in a large family in rural New Hampshire (the first born of eight children, all born in 10 years). Professionally, she spent many years as a medical assistant in obstetrics and gynecology, and then pediatrics. After switching her focus to business management, she began working at Good Beginnings more than eight years ago. She lives in Hanover, N.H., with her three children.

For more information about Good Beginnings, visit [goodbeginnings.net](http://goodbeginnings.net) or call (603) 298-9524.