

WHAT MATTERS TO MOMS

february 2008

Parenting

TURN ANY
KID INTO
A GOOD
SLEEPER

**FOOD
ALLERGIES**

Is your
child
at risk?

The truth about
**BABY
BONDING**

WHY IT'S OKAY
TO BRIBE YOUR
CHILD (**honest!**)

Bring sexy back
HOT ADVICE
FOR TIRED MOMS

**Got
clutter?**
easy
solutions

Parenting.com



New mom on board

There's only one thing more wide-eyed and helpless than a baby: the woman who gave birth to her by Jennifer Graham Kizer

My daughter, Isabel, is 1. I love giving out this information. I can't say it without laughing. I mean, who's 1? "Don't mess with me, punk," I like to tell her. "I'm thirty-five times your age." Or sometimes I'll say, "I have cans of soup older than you."

Then she smiles and trips into my arms—a staple in her repertoire of gestures that take my breath away.

Isabel and I are newbies to the mom-and-daughter thing. She's the trailblazing first child (and grandchild, on both sides). I've been a mother for 396 days. We've only just arrived at the kiddie pool and the pumpkin patch, the church nursery, and all those other mommy-baby venues. We have little experience but big plans. Oh, have we got plans.

Recently, we made our first visit to a weekly moms-and-kids group. There are a dozen women from my church who gather to converse in the midst of a screeching, toy-hurling hurricane. (Apparently, the more toddlers you put in a room, the harder they party.) It's a spectacular experience. If I am ever needed on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange, I will have no problem focusing.

On that playgroup morning, Isabel wakes me with her usual baby-monitor broadcast of sweet nothings, babbled into the ears of her stuffed animals. My mother once told me that her favorite sounds were those of her children's voices. I no longer think this is corny.

I dress Isabel in her new jeans. Jeans! On a 1-year-old! It kills me! "They're even boot-cut," I tell her as I buckle her into her car seat.

"Dettle, deetle, deetle," she replies.

I realize there are more seasoned parents out there, and they don't always relish my new-mommy zeal. Who among us, as college seniors, didn't want to flick the heads of the freshmen think-they-know-it-alls? I imagine that someday, if I have three kids who have already been wearing jeans for years, I might roll my eyes at the mommy-come-lately who thinks her denim-clad baby deserves to lead



the Cute Parade through the center of town.

But luckily, the moms in my playgroup are kind. They have multiple kids, who are at every possible age and stage. They have every right to let their eyes glaze over when I arrive with my single, chubby-cheeked baby. "Isabel has started pointing at things!" I announce, unable to stop myself, a half hour in. I might as well wear a sign: "Direct snide comments here, please." But no one sneers at me or asks if I want a medal. Instead, they cheer me on.

Meanwhile, Isabel goes about her business, which is defying death. While the moms talk, she scouts for the nearest exit. (Perhaps she could throw herself in front of a car.) She

MOM'S-EYE VIEW

locates the stairs. (Tumble several feet? Might be effective.) She shadows the 65-pound Lab, holding its tail.

And so, although I'm enjoying a conversation on finances, I step away to retrieve my wayward baby. As we turn to real estate, I excuse myself a second time and drag her back. And as the women discuss the competitive world of preschool entrance, I miss out *again*.

Then I get exasperated. "Why isn't anyone else chasing after her children?" I ask.

"Because we don't care if our children get hurt," someone says cheerfully, and everyone laughs. She doesn't mean this literally, of course. These mothers have simply learned from experience that children move about and explore and sometimes get hurt. But rare is the accident that leads to an emergency room; most are fixed with a hug, or possibly a cookie.

"You'll see!" another mom says.

"It's just that she seems almost magnetically drawn to danger," I say. I offer the finger-in-the-socket example; it's one of her favorite household hazards.

"Mine tries to put dimes in the socket," someone replies. I am trumped.

Other moms know exactly how I feel when Isabel does something for the first time. I literally shiver with joy.

What a rookie.

And so be it. In terms of motherhood, I'm a 1-year-old. No one expects Isabel, on her first try, to fit the star and the square and the triangle into their proper places on her Spin-a-Shape Elephant. And these moms don't expect me, in a snap, to intuit all the nuances involved in raising a healthy child. It comes with experience.

On the other hand, there are two pieces of mommy wisdom I was born knowing. One: If there was ever an event to justify unbridled enthusiasm, it's a new baby. Two: What passes between a mother and her child during these first years is sacred.

The moms go easy on me because they know these things, too. They know how I feel when Isabel does something for the first time. I literally shiver with joy.

Oh! Here comes a shiver now. As we're leaving the playgroup, Isabel spots a ball in the corner. "Ball," she says—and points to it!

Isn't that amazing? ■

Jennifer Graham Kizer usually interviews celebrities for magazines but finds children to be more interesting.