A baby’s look at EQ
Emotional Intelligence

Melodie de Jager

Introduction
Holding a newborn baby is one of those moments in life when even the most emotionally controlled mom or dad feels a myriad of emotions wash over them - feelings of awe, exhaustion, love, affection, anger, uncertainty, vulnerability, pride, rejection, excitement and a whole lot more. It is a time when many moms go through a roller coaster ride of baby blues, guilt for not feeling motherly, afraid that they may fall behind and be forgotten at work, too tired to look and be sexy for daddy - all mixed together with the wonder of having created such an amazing bundle of life.

Doctors will tell you RELAX, all these emotions are the result of confused hormones – sort out your hormones and the emotional roller coaster ride will subside. During this time of adapting to a whole new life and an identity as a mom, your baby is going through a similar experience. Babies are human becomings, not human beings – they are learning to become human beings through watching and copying you!

In essence – if you go through a range of emotions, so will your baby! The beauty of your baby experiencing a whole range of emotions, is that she is well on her way to become a well-rounded human being, due to the exposure to many different ways of feeling human.

Emotions are crucial building blocks in the development of your baby

Emotions are the little chemical reactions in the body that propels you forward, that motivates you, that says HEY, this is important! – I want to remember this and store it in my memory for later use. The chemical reactions of emotions also work like glue, creating a bond between people – if there is no emotion, there is no relationship and without relationship no one can develop to his or her full potential.

What about your baby and emotions?
From the moment of conception baby starts to impact on his environment and mom ‘responds’ by feeling nauseous, has heartburn or she might simply glow. Mom’s response to the pregnancy creates a chemical environment that impacts on baby, forming the base pattern for all further development.

Let us imagine the first year of life through the mind and heart of a baby...

During pregnancy
During a normal pregnancy baby feels safe, warm, rocked and protected with an online food supply. Baby belongs. She is surrounded by mom’s rhythmic heartbeat and the soothing sounds of moms breathing and digestion. Baby feels one with her surroundings and confident about her place in it! In the absence of others, baby has no one to compare or compete with so she does not feel analysed, evaluated, labelled or judged. Baby simply sighs contently, smiles and plays in her personalised condo – the uterus.

Baby’s experience is a little like a Robinson Crusoe existence - every moment in utero is there to be explored and enjoyed while her needs are met. Can you imagine an existence like this – no pressure, no expectations, no budgets or wardrobe choices? No mirrors or scales... as a matter of fact... the more she grows and gains weight the happier everybody becomes!
Birthday
The big day arrives and all existence as baby knows it ceases to exist. Mom’s water breaks and there goes his security blanket! The next moment pressure builds around him and he gets pushed and forced into a tiny space. Gone is his sense of safety and security. Gone is the world as he knew it. He is frightened, insecure, and doesn’t know what is going on, he feels like he needs to do something but he has no idea what. Mom’s breathing, heartbeat and stress levels have changed; not even the sounds surrounding him are familiar and soothing anymore. He is simply terrified! Even feeling terrified is a new sensation for him and that makes him feel like he wants to boil over...

The pressure stops and all of a sudden his safe, dark, warm, and moist environment is replaced by a piercing light. OUCH! The soothing and muted sounds are replaced by the sound of loud voices and sharp sounds like metal on metal. OUCH! No blanket - no warmth only a rush of cold air. OUCH! What happened?

What has baby done to deserve this? This must be the end!

He is confused, frightened out of his mind, and he has absolutely no social skills to cope with this scene. He cannot talk – he doesn’t even know that words exist, never mind having the right word for the right moment! Although babies hear language in utero, they only hear the ebb and flow of speech- a stream of sound. Baby wonders -what now? His world has been shattered.

Can you imagine the ‘trauma’ of birth and the tremendous impact it has on the baby?

For the first time in his life he is stretched out to full length (a length he didn’t know he had) and the weirdest thing happens in his chest...he starts to breathe! Forcing his lips apart, his breathing and something else combines to produce his first cry - an experience that frightens the living daylights out of him. The stress! How does he cope with it?

He does what he knows best- he scrunches his eyes to hide in the darkness, and pulls himself into a little ball to feel protected in the vast space all around him. Luckily he is placed on a warm surface that enfolds and protects him like a harbor – at last, his mommy’s warm body and embracing arms! He feels warmer, safer, and he can hear his mommy’s heartbeat again. Instinctively his mouth starts to grope around, searching to be one with mom. He finds her nipple and he finds peace. He has found his first anchor in life - his mom! His mom is his world. She is the source of food, the source of comfort and the source of all knowledge. She selects what he may experience and learn. She is the creator of his universe. Slowly warmth starts spreading inside of him and the emotional chemicals in his body rejoice - instant glue. Bonding!

This bond is the foundation of all further emotional development. It is the template for all future relationships. It is the template he will use to build relationships with others. It is a bond that says: You are important. You are loved and accepted. You belong. You are one of us.

First months
Remember, emotions are chemical reactions. The chemical reactions (as a result of this first intense emotional experience between mom and baby) spur the brain on to do something to survive – and the only way to survive, is to learn. She needs to learn to sense her environment and respond to it positively.

Luckily the brain rises to the challenge and comes to the rescue when the intense need to sense the environment, tickles the senses (the nose, taste buds, the eyes, the ears and especially the skin) to wake up. This wake-up call results in her wailing when she smells a stranger, hears a sudden loud noise or sees a bright light. She wails and flags her arms to chase the threat away. All she wants is her anchor: MOM.
The tickling of the senses excite her and make her curious to want to see, hear, touch and to explore more. She is born to learn with enthusiasm and she is pre-programmed to do just that. All she needs is something to tickle her senses which make the brain jump to attention and into action. When baby uses all her senses to smell mom, see her bopping face, hear her soothing voice, touch her soft skin, and taste her whilst feeding, a strong picture of mom is formed. This picture creates an intense emotional reaction resulting in a feeling of safety and security. The more often this intense experience with mom is repeated, the stronger the bond between mom and baby and the firmer baby’s emotional foundation for later relationships.

Mom is baby’s universe, but slowly she becomes aware that there is more - dad. His smell is different, he looks different, his touch and voice is different and initially baby is a little afraid of him and... WHAAA she wails and dad goes away! But luckily dad is wise enough not persist and mom realises dad and baby need more time together. Slowly baby starts to recognise dad. Dad expands her universe and with that comes that familiar warm feeling of safety and security. Dad is so BIG and he is so STRONG. His hands are a little rougher and baby’s senses go: Hi! Here is something new we need to learn about! After some time with dad her brain says: Yes, I know him. I want to be with him and voila, her second successful relationship gives her a feeling of safety. To part from mom and dad is not easy, but when they put her down, it is easier for her when they talk to her a bit, then she can hear their voices which tell her – they are still here, I am not alone, I am still safe.

Her eyes are getting used to the light, her ears to the sounds and her skin to the clothes. Because mom and dad keep her safely in the same cot/pram her senses get restless and ask for more tickling/ stimulation. Up and till now her sense of smell and taste were the strongest- warning her of any changes, but it is not enough. It becomes BORING after a while! The brain registers the boredom and quickly implements the next plan – project DISCOVER HANDS. She discovers her hands and that they can touch! Touching different things creates different feelings – some things are soft and warm, others hard and cold. She wants to touch some things over and over because it creates a ‘bubble’ in her chest that eventually rises up and results in a smile! Some things make her skin go cold and ‘bumpy’ and she wails to get rid of it. Her hands instinctively take all objects to her mouth so that her sense of taste and smell can help her to create a clear picture of the object in the brain, allowing her to build a library of sensory pictures. The more often she experiences the same things, the stronger the memory and the more confident she becomes. Now she does not only know mom and dad, but she knows her teddy, rattle, bottle and hands. She feels safe and secure in her environment and ready to venture further away from mom and dad!

Mom and dad’s wisdom to stimulate his senses and keep things simple and familiar in the beginning by repeating the same routine over and over, has created a strong sense of security. Now he is ready to take on the world and even a new caregiver if mom needs to go back to work! He feels confident and secure and ready to explore the world and his place in it. He is also becoming ‘curiouser and curiouser’ about others and thus well on his way to become emotionally intelligent!