

# Child Development and the Role of the Health Visitor

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Health visitors are registered nurses who usually have at least two years experience in nursing before undergoing their health visitor training. They are usually based in either a GP surgery, or at a health centre, working alongside GPs and other health and social care professionals.

All families with children under five are allocated a health visiting team comprising of Health Visitors, Nursery Nurses, Community Nurse and a Health Care Assistant. Sometimes, first contact with families is at the antenatal stage (before a baby is born). Once a baby is born, and then at various stages within a child's life, depending on need. Health visitors can visit you at home, or see you at the child health clinic.

The service can provide advice and support on a range of problems such as immunisations, sleeping, diet and food, (for both you and your child) accident prevention, difficulty in breast feeding, toddler tantrums, potty training and many more. We can also give information on local services, such as baby massage groups, stop smoking groups and facilities available to you, in your local community.

Remember your health visitor is not just concerned about the health of your child, but of your whole family.

## **Shakespeare Surgery**

We are very fortunate to have as a lead Health Visitor Rebecca Morton.

She has a number of years of experience in this very specialised field of nursing. She is also then part of a wider team where further support can be made available as needed

There have been recent changes to the number of child health checks that your child will receive. However, your health visitors will be able to provide information and support about child development when needed.

There are different developmental stages within your child's life.

### **11-28 days after birth**

- Your health visitor will usually visit you at home, between 11-14 days after the birth of your baby. This initial visit can often take up to 2 hours. She will ask you for your Child Health Record Book. If you have not been supplied with this she will ensure you get one. This is your personal record of your child's development until they are well into school age, and will need to be brought to clinic every time you attend. She will discuss this book with you during the visit.

If needed, a follow up visit can be arranged and you will be provided with information about the Shakespeare Surgery baby clinic where you will be able to get your infant weighed and immunised. You will also be given relevant contact numbers. All of this information will be recorded in your Child Health Record Book.

#### **4-8 weeks**

- It is usual to attend the Baby Clinic to get your baby weighed. You can discuss any concerns at this point with Karen who will, if necessary, direct you to see your GP. She will also discuss issues such as breastfeeding, sleep routine, safety and childhood immunisations. This visit is an ideal time for you to discuss any concerns that you may have.

At 6 - 9 weeks, we may ask you to fill in a small questionnaire, which can help in detecting post-natal depression. You will also be due a six week check by your GP. Generally, at 6 weeks your baby may now be smiling, be startled by loud noises and recognise familiar voices.

#### **8 weeks**

- Your baby will now be ready for their first set of immunisations. You will usually receive an appointment and date through the post informing you each time your child is due an immunisation.

#### **12 weeks**

- When you attend Baby Clinic, you may be offered advice about weaning your baby. It is recommended that babies do not start taking solids (food) until they are six months old. During this visit you can discuss types of foods that are suitable to start weaning with, and also foods that should be avoided in the early stages. You will also discuss other issues such as sleep routine, use of safety equipment in the home and general development and health of your child.

You may also be asked to fill in the post natal depression questionnaire which you initially completed at six weeks.

Your child will now be ready for their second set of immunisations.

At this stage, your baby may now be more alert visually and starting to respond to familiar situations and routines, such as bath times and feeds. He or she may also be able to briefly hold a rattle if placed in their hand and may be able to clasp both hands together.

#### **7 - 9 months**

- Your baby will receive a hearing test which will be carried out by either two health visitors, or a health visitor and a nursery nurse. An appointment for this will be sent out to you. When you attend for this test, you may be asked to once again to fill in the post-natal depression questionnaire.

At nine months, your baby may now be sitting unsupported and be able to stand with support. He or she may have started to reach out and grasp certain objects and may also have the ability to chew solid food and enjoy finger foods. They may babble tunefully as a form of communication and understand 'no' and 'bye bye'.

#### **2 year check**

- Health visitors usually send out a birthday cards when child reach their second birthdays, inviting you to make contact if you have any concerns about the following issues -
  - toilet training
  - toddler tantrums
  - sleep
  - eating/diet
  - speech
  - safety
  - hearing

They may also feel it is appropriate to carry out a home visit to discuss any concerns with you.

Generally, at two years your child may now be able carry out activities such as kicking a ball, building a tower with 8 bricks, holding a pencil and using a spoon to eat their food.

He or she should be saying single words or more, be able to point to known objects when you ask and also be able to carry out basic instructions. If you have any concerns regarding your child's speech, please contact your health visitor initially.

Often between 18 months and 2½ years, your toddler may ask for the potty/toilet.

#### **4 year check**

- Your child will now be due their pre-school booster immunisations. They may also have their height and weight recorded. If you want to discuss any concerns about your child's health before they start school, you should contact your health visitor initially.

Generally, at this stage your child may now be able to build a tower with 10 bricks, recognise four colours, be able to play with other children in a group, yet also have the ability to concentrate when playing by themselves. They may now also have the ability to get dressed/undressed by themselves.