Infant Physical & Perceptual Development Exercise

**Grasping**

As you know, at birth babies have a “grasping reflex”. When something is placed in their palm, their hands curl around the object and cannot voluntarily let go. As grasping become voluntary, babies go through the following stages of picking up objects:

1. Picking up and holding an object with all fingers wrapped around the object and pressed against the palm.
2. Index finger against side of thumb (so that sides of index finger and thumb are touching). This is called the scissors grasp.
3. Ball of index finger against ball of thumb. This is called a pincer grasp.

Try each of these techniques of picking up a piece of paper. Try them again with a pencil or similar small object. Think about the following questions:

A. Which of these techniques feels most comfortable or natural?
B. Which is most effective?
C. If an infant can only use a whole-hand grasp, or a scissors grasp, how does it affect his/her interaction with the environment? What can he/she do or not do? What kinds of toys or objects are accessible?

**Crawling and Walking**

When neonates are placed on their stomachs, they are generally unable to lift their heads or shoulders up from the floor. As they gain muscle strength and control, babies go through the following stages:

1. When lying on their stomachs, babies are able to lift their heads and shoulders up, perpendicular to the floor.
2. Babies are able to lift their body up off the floor, so that legs and arms are extended, but their head faces down (parallel to the floor).
3. Babies are able to lift their bodies up on all fours, and lift their heads up perpendicular to the floor, but cannot move to a new location.
4. Babies are able to lift their bodies and heads, and crawl. Usually, babies will crawl backward first, then forward.
5. Babies are able to stand while holding on to something, but not walk. They must drop to the floor and crawl to move to a new location.
6. Babies are able to walk.

At home, when no one can see you, try out these positions. Consider:

A. What can the baby see from each position? What kinds of stimuli (people and things) will they be most aware of?
B. How does this affect the baby’s interaction with things? Could he/she carry a toy? If so, how?
C. Can the baby move from place to place? What can he/she see or do while moving?