

Homes & Real Estate

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Tips to help your baby grow up in a healthy environment

Here are the latest, greatest and greenest approaches and products for “bringing up baby.”

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The tiniest humans make the best case for going green.

Who doesn't want babies to be safe and healthy and have a sustainable world to grow up in?

But parents and others with babies in their lives face many dilemmas in making the best choices for their little one, their household and the planet. Today, we'll run through (or crawl through) the latest, greatest and greenest approaches and products for “bringing up baby.”

Nursery

Let's start even before birth, with preparation of the baby's room. If you're a grandparent or other frequent caregiver, you'll also want to make sure your home has a welcoming place for the baby.

Make indoor air quality a prime concern. Chemicals in the air emanating from new paint, new carpet or air fresheners can affect babies.

A strong chemical smell from paint or carpet often comes from VOCs (volatile organic compounds). VOCs have been linked to cancer and other health problems, and pregnant and nursing women and small children face at greatest risk. Use low-VOC paint, and paint the nursery at least two months before the due date.

Diapers

The diaper decision process doesn't have to stink. With so many convenient, greener diaper choices now available in both cloth and disposables, parents can experiment to find the best system, or use a combination.

Consider reusable cloth diapers first. Depending on how they are used, cloth diapers should generate less waste than disposable diapers. Costs vary widely for all diapering methods.

A cloth diaper service that drops off fresh diapers works well for many parents. The two main choices locally are the 68-year-old Baby Diaper Service (babydiaperservice.net), covering seven counties in the Puget Sound area, and Diaper Stork (diaperstork.com), which started last fall and serves an area that stretches from Shoreline to Burien to Redmond.

More parents now buy their own cloth diapers and wash them at home. Online “co-ops” offering cloth diapers at group-purchase discounts have become increasingly popular. These are usually Facebook groups.

However, the nonprofit cloth diaper advocacy group Real Diaper Association (realdiaperassociation.org) urges parents to be cautious about joining these diaper co-ops, as problems have been reported with quality and pricing.

If you don't love cloth diapers, it's much easier these days to find disposable diapers that are more planet- and kid-friendly than most major brands (without chlorine, fragrances, dyes or latex, for example).

More-sustainable disposable diaper brands available at local stores or online include BabyGanics, Bambo Nature, Earth's Best, Honest, Seventh Generation and Whole Foods 365.

Food

Healthy, sustainable baby food choices abound, but they can be pricey. Puréed organic baby foods or smoothies in plastic pouches are convenient, but the pouches are not easily recyclable, which makes them less sustainable.

If you have the time, you can save money by making your own baby food using the hundreds of recipes available online. Put your homemade baby food in reusable plastic pouches such as Squooshi (squooshi.com).

In Seattle and parts of the Eastside, you can have healthy, homemade baby food delivered by services including Mix & Mash (mixandmash.com) and Garden Grow (gardengroworganics.com).

Equipment and clothing

The greenest baby equipment — from strollers to cribs to car seats — will generally be the most durable, well-made items. But that doesn't mean you need to spend hundreds of dollars on each of those.

Arrange with family members and friends to share items when their babies have outgrown them, and return the favor.

For equipment and clothes you need to buy, get them used whenever possible, either online or at the many area secondhand stores that specialize in baby items. For both used and new equipment purchases, consult online reviews and manufacturer websites, especially regarding safety issues and recalls.

You can donate gently-used clothing and equipment to the local nonprofits WestSide Baby (westsidebaby.org), based in White Center, and Eastside Baby Corner (babycorner.org) in Issaquah. Check their requirements to make sure they can use the items.

Babies grow up, but their environmental impact can last indefinitely. By reducing that impact at the very beginning, we invest in their future and keep them happy and healthy, gurgling and crying and pooping and doing all those perfect things that babies do.

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