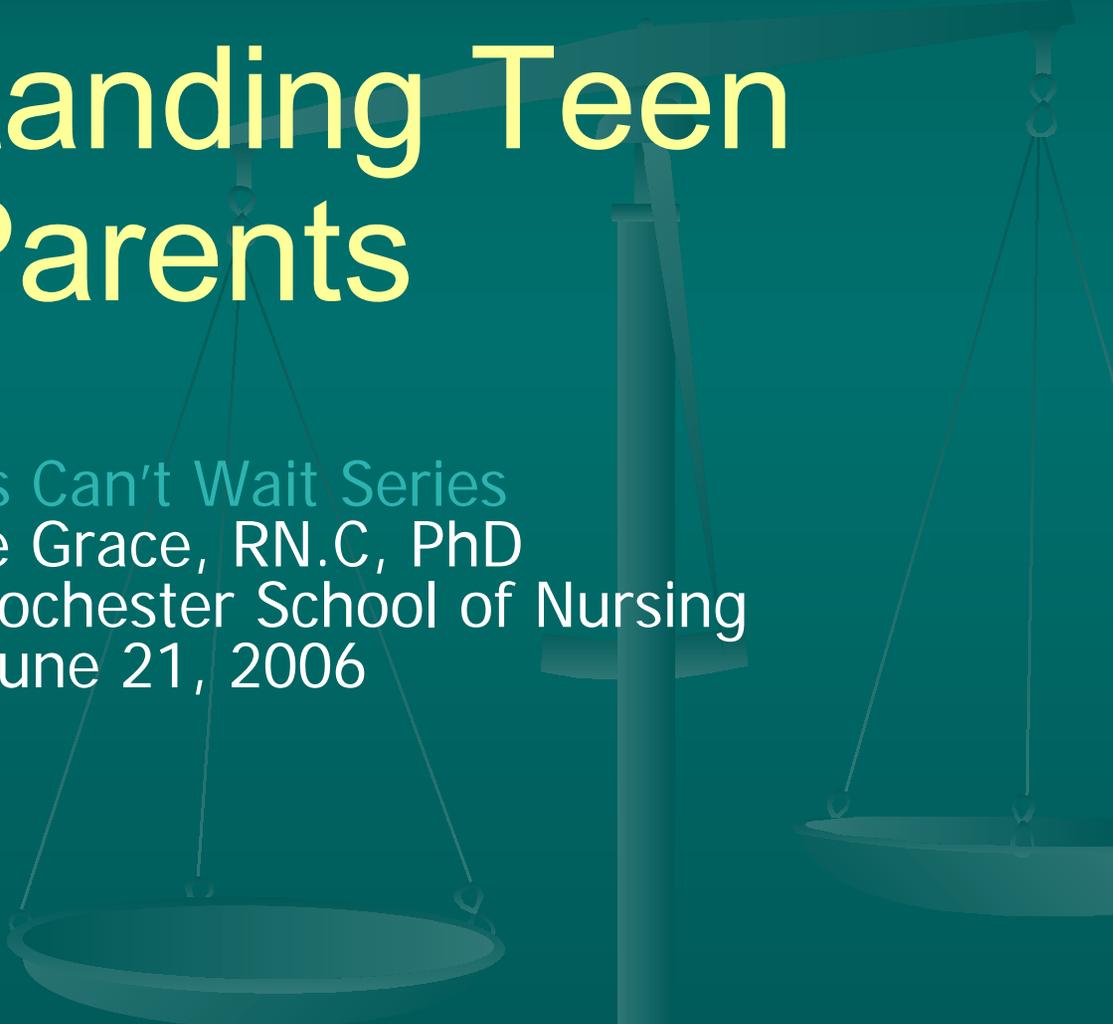


Understanding Teen Parents

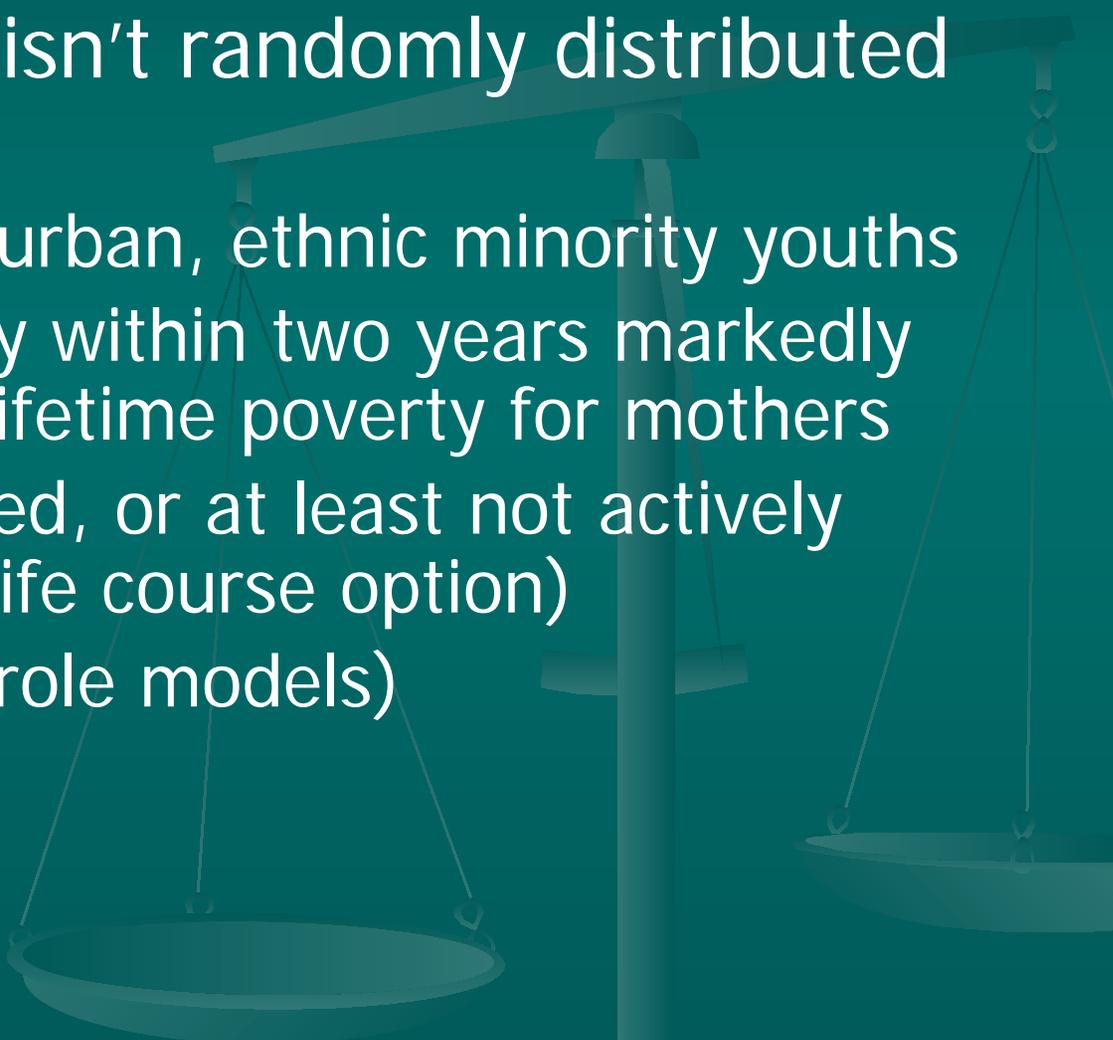


Babies Can't Wait Series
Jeanne Grace, RN.C, PhD
University of Rochester School of Nursing
June 21, 2006

My credentials for talking about teen parents and their babies

- Dissertation Study: followed 70+ young disadvantaged mothers and babies from birth to kindergarten 1987-1993
 - Conducted about 300 home visits with young families during this period
- Provided prenatal care in the Rochester Adolescent Maternity Program 1991-2005 (I'm a women's health care nurse practitioner)

Restating the obvious

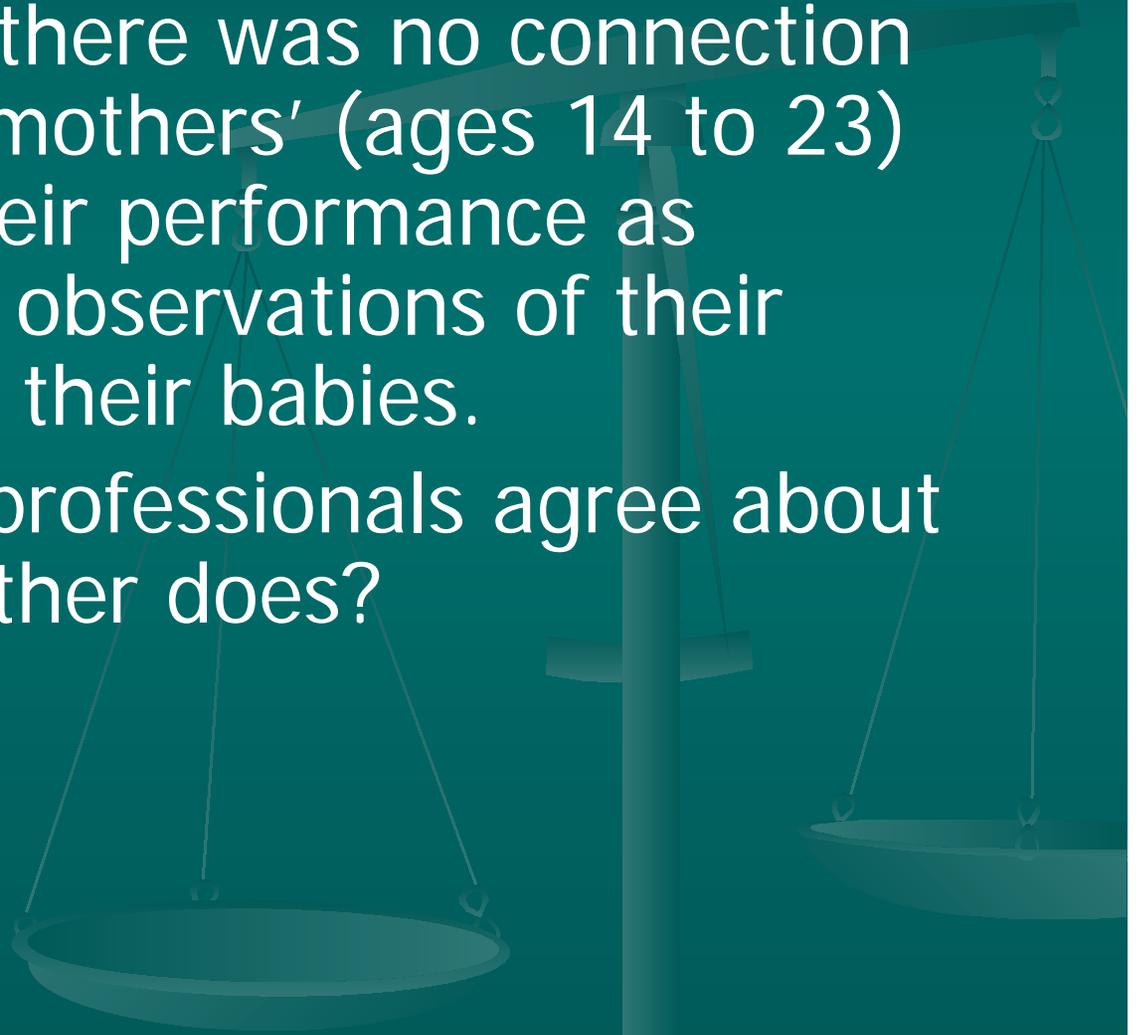
- Teen pregnancy isn't randomly distributed in the population
 - Highest rates for urban, ethnic minority youths
 - Second pregnancy within two years markedly increases risk of lifetime poverty for mothers
 - Sometimes planned, or at least not actively avoided (default life course option)
 - Runs in families (role models)
- 

Restating the obvious

- For troubled adolescent females, unprotected sex (and hence pregnancy) may be part of a constellation of risky behaviors - fighting, substance use, school dropout, etc.
- Adolescent parents vary widely in their abilities, energy and resources for parenting. Some do a terrific job of raising children while attending to their own developmental goals, as well.
- In your setting, you're more apt to see the troubled than the terrific!

What is a good mother?

- In my research, there was no connection between young mothers' (ages 14 to 23) self-ratings of their performance as mothers and my observations of their interactions with their babies.
- Do parents and professionals agree about what a good mother does?



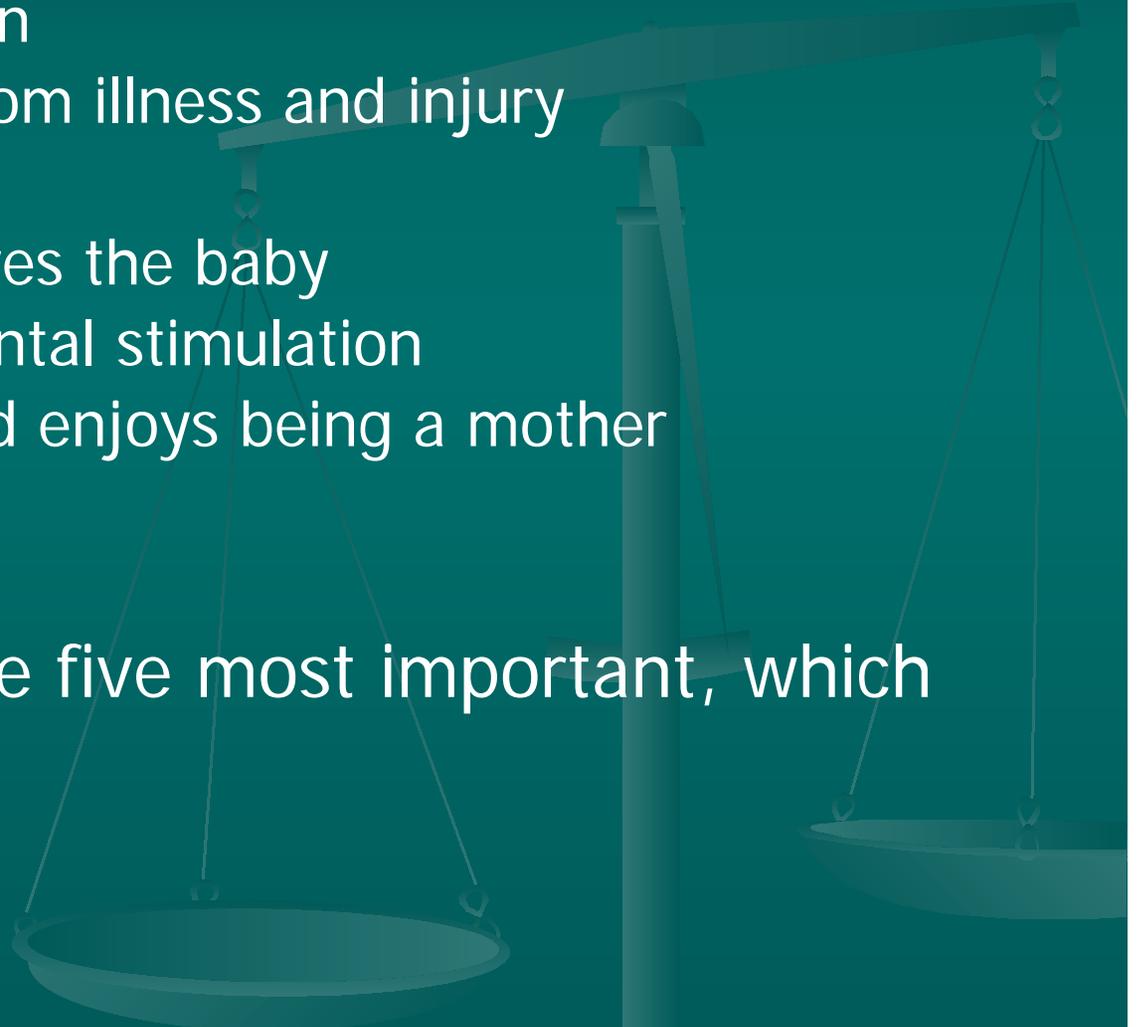
What is a good mother?

- On the basis of interviews with new mothers of all ages, Mercer (1986) identified these descriptors for what a good mother does
 - Keeps the baby clean
 - Protects the baby from illness and injury
 - Teaches the baby
 - Comforts and nurtures the baby
 - Provides developmental stimulation
 - Is loving, giving, and enjoys being a mother
 - Feeds the baby
 - Plays with the baby

Which of these are most important?

- Keeps the baby clean
- Protects the baby from illness and injury
- Teaches the baby
- Comforts and nurtures the baby
- Provides developmental stimulation
- Is loving, giving, and enjoys being a mother
- Feeds the baby
- Plays with the baby

If you had to pick the five most important, which would YOU pick?



What is a good mother? Choices of young disadvantaged mothers

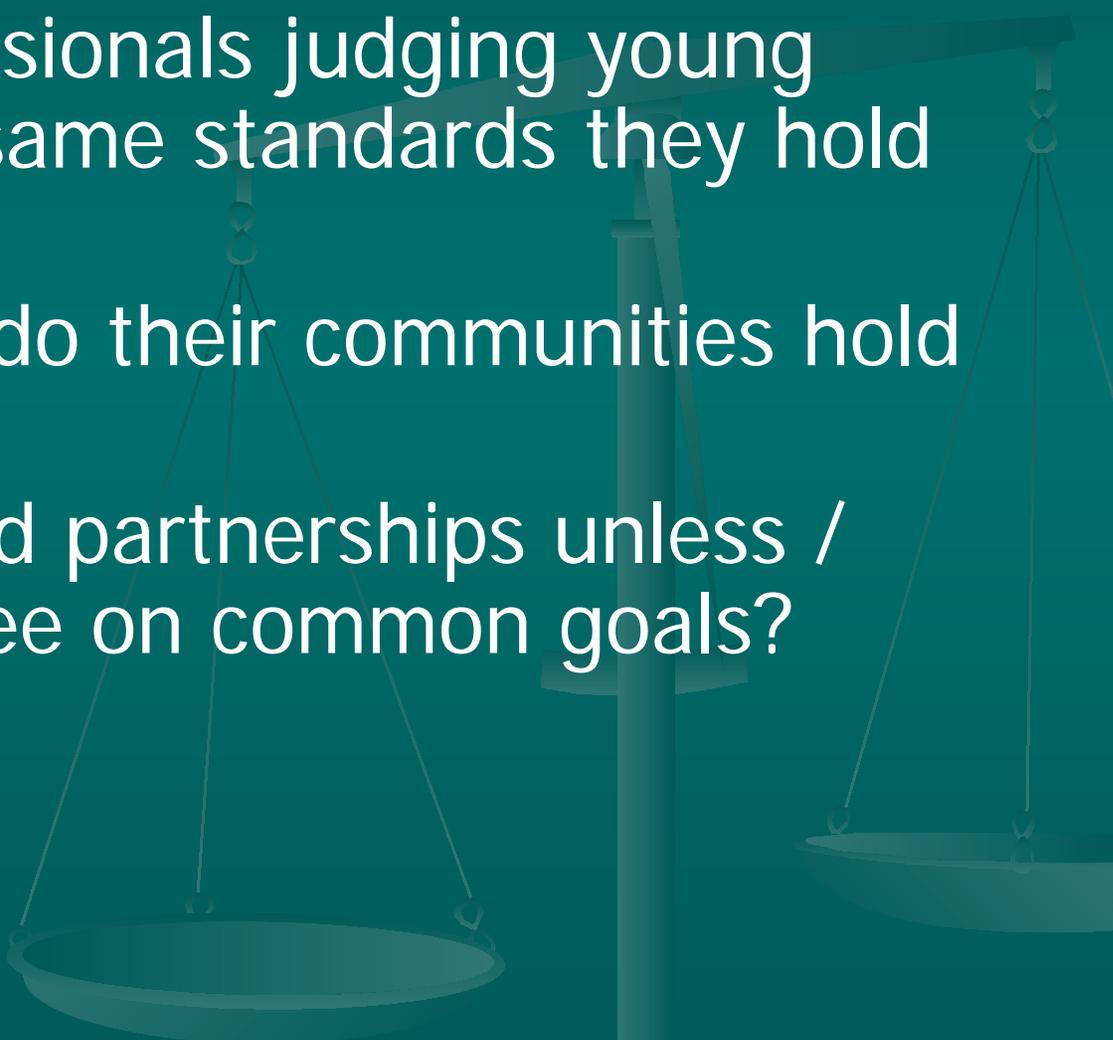
Characteristic	% chosen
Keeps the baby clean	85.6%
Protects from illness and injury	75.6%
Teaches the baby	61.1%
Comforts and nurtures the baby	60%
Provides developmental stimulation	33%
Is loving, giving, enjoys being mom	86.7%
Feeds the baby	70%
Plays with the baby	24.4%

N=90

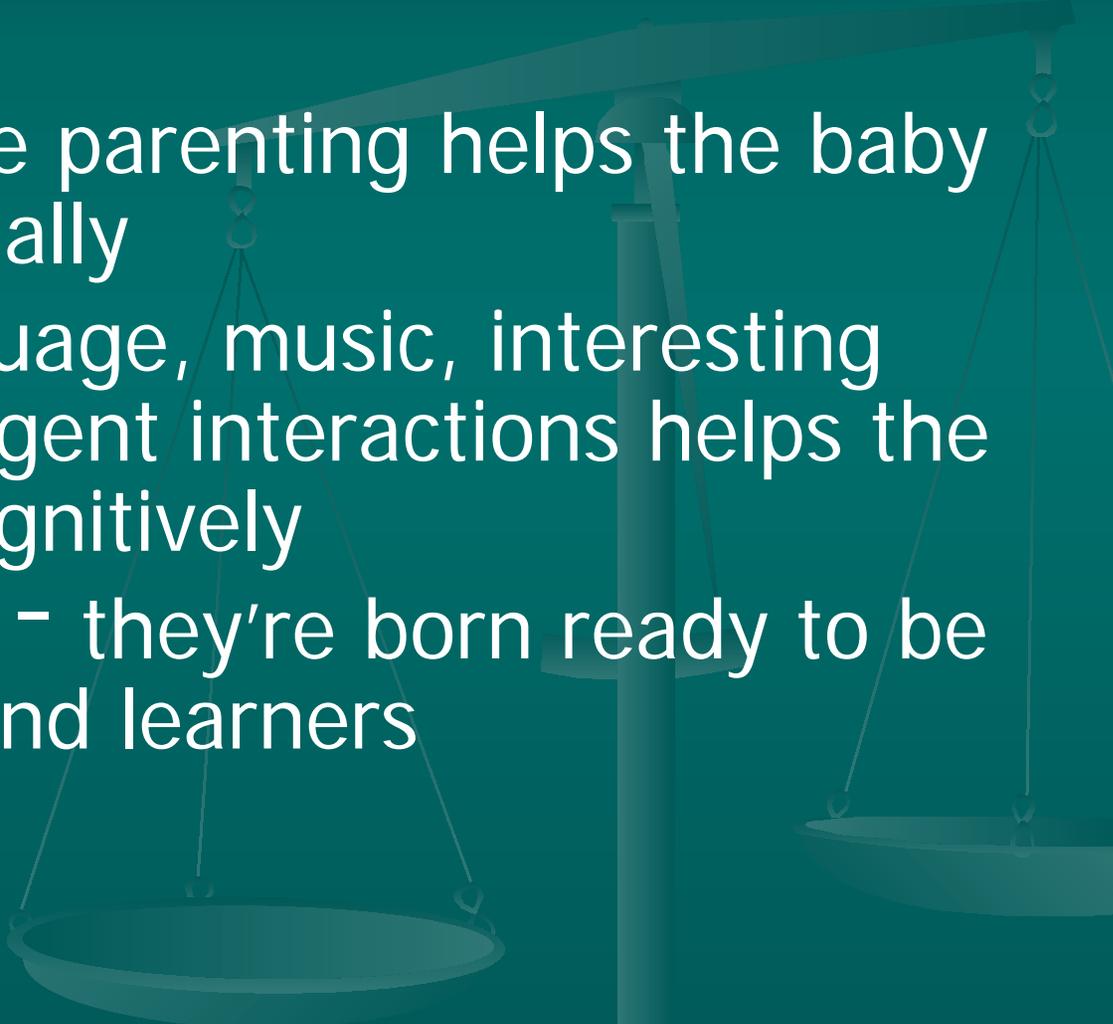
What is a good mother?

- Age differences in choices
 - Younger moms more likely to choose “play with the baby” (OR = .731, $p = .033$)
 - Younger moms less likely to choose “teach the baby” (OR = 1.3, $p = .043$)
- Regardless of age, moms who choose “keeps the baby clean” less likely to choose “developmental stimulation” or “play” as also important
 - (OR = .09, $p = .012$; OR = .115, $p = .029$)

So what?

- Are we as professionals judging young mothers by the same standards they hold for themselves?
 - What standards do their communities hold for them?
 - How can we build partnerships unless / until we can agree on common goals?
- 

What do I as an infant advocate think is important?

- Warm, responsive parenting helps the baby develop emotionally
 - Exposure to language, music, interesting sights and contingent interactions helps the baby develop cognitively
 - Babies can't wait - they're born ready to be social partners and learners
- 

What are the barriers for young mothers achieving this?

- Lack of belief in the social abilities of babies.
 - I asked new moms “When do you think your baby will be able to see and hear clearly, and it will be important to talk to and teach your baby?” Moms’ answers ranged from “right away” to “when he’s two years old”.

What are the barriers for young mothers achieving this?

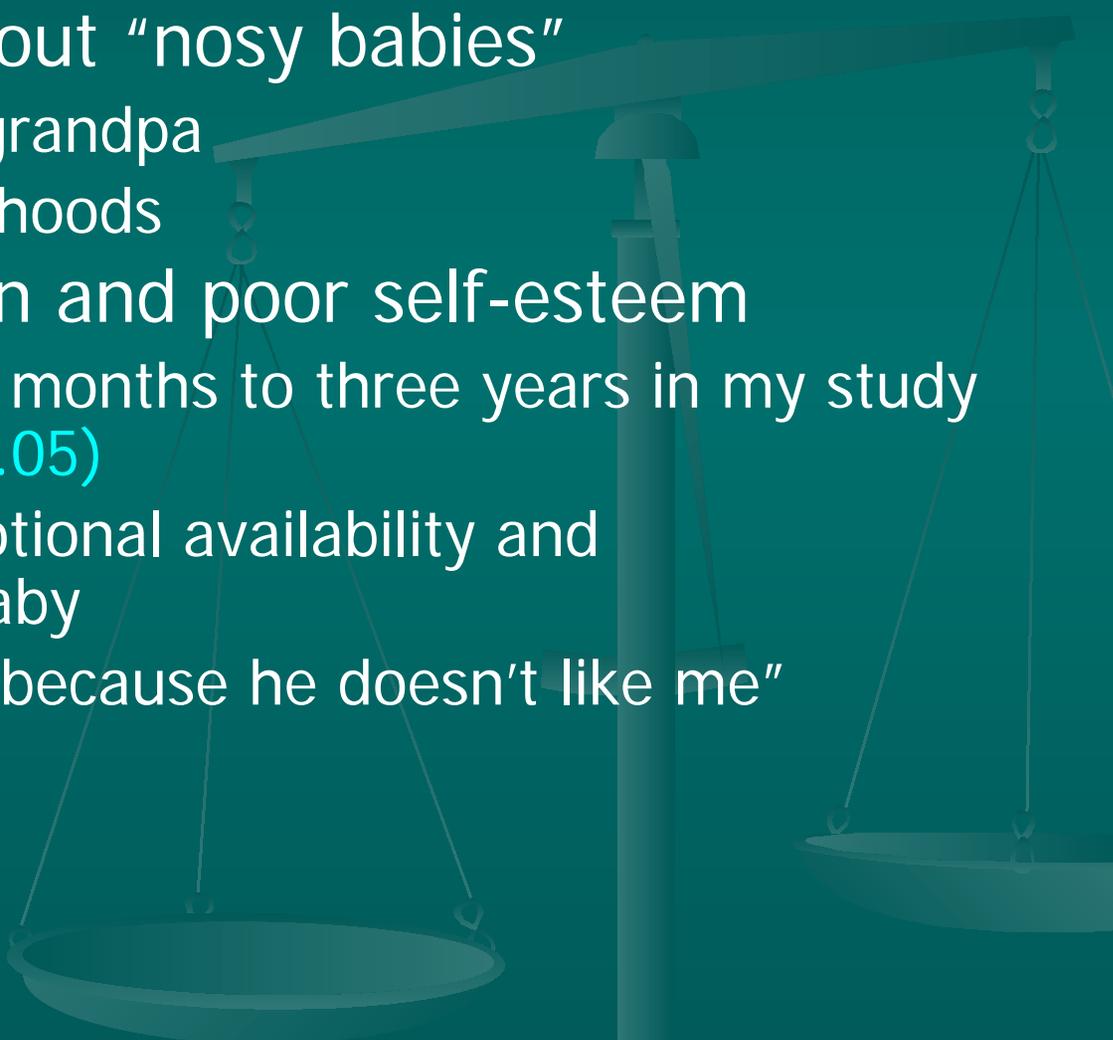
- Lack of belief in the social abilities of babies.
 - Moms in my study who believed babies could see and hear clearly at younger ages were more responsive to their newborns AND provided a more growth-facilitating environment (HOME scale) for their babies at three months of age.

($r = -.333$, $r = -.371$, $p < .001$)

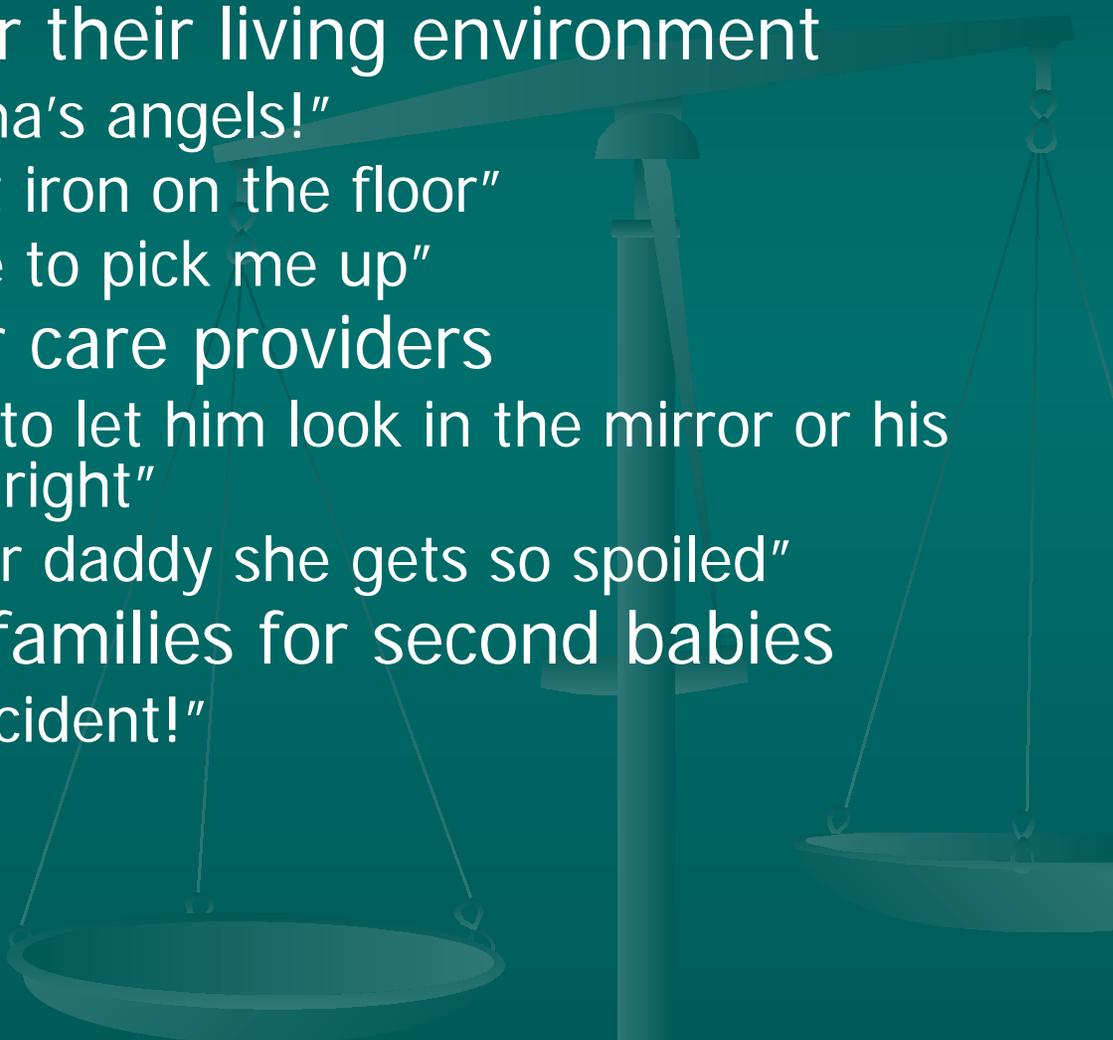
What are the barriers for young mothers achieving this?

- Lack of belief in the social abilities of babies.
 - In turn, HOME scale scores at **three months** were related to child language achievement scores and child “intelligence” scores (Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test) at **five years**.
($r = .323$, $r = .429$, $p < .01$)

What are the barriers for young mothers achieving this?

- Social sanctions about “nosy babies”
 - “Jermaine” and his grandpa
 - Dangerous neighborhoods
 - Maternal depression and poor self-esteem
 - Persistent from nine months to three years in my study ($r = .31$ to $.57, p < .05$)
 - Restricts mom’s emotional availability and responsiveness to baby
 - “he’s just doing this because he doesn’t like me”
- 

What are the barriers for young mothers achieving this?

- Lack of control over their living environment
 - "Don't touch grandma's angels!"
 - "My cousin left a hot iron on the floor"
 - "My ride never came to pick me up"
 - Conflicts with other care providers
 - "My auntie says not to let him look in the mirror or his teeth won't come in right"
 - "When she's with her daddy she gets so spoiled"
 - Less support from families for second babies
 - "This one was no accident!"
- 

What are the barriers for young mothers achieving this?

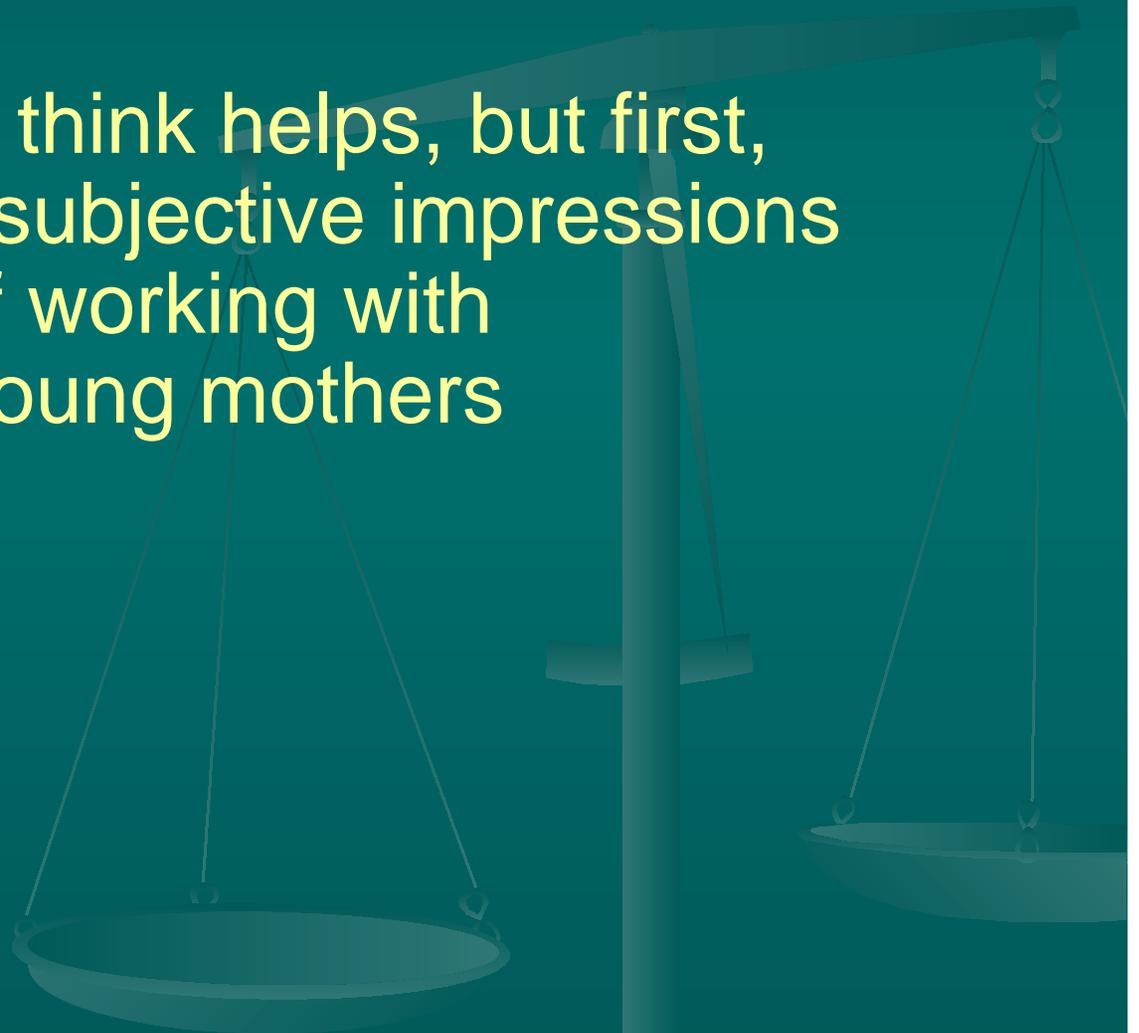
- Troubled teens aren't magically transformed by parenthood
 - Still have trouble dealing with rules
 - May have conflicted or abusive relationships with parent figures
 - Moving out of family household into own apartment may be seen as solution



What are the barriers for young mothers achieving this?

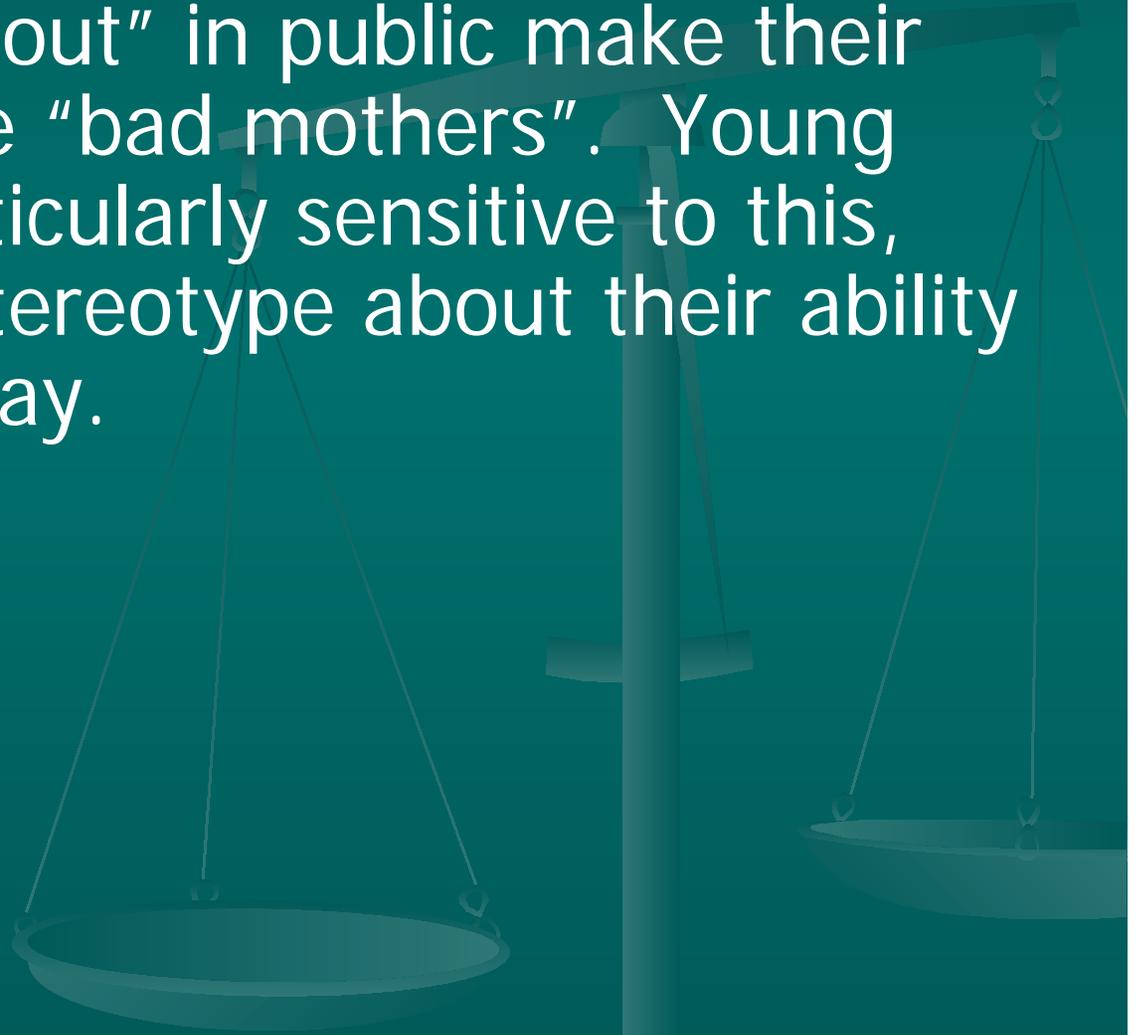
- Troubled teens aren't magically transformed by parenthood
 - Often lack the skills to make partnerships with professionals to achieve goals
 - Have trouble understanding that another's viewpoint is not the same as theirs
 - Conflicts with other adults and teens
 - Inappropriate choices for child's experience
 - Kristal and the Chuckie doll video
 - Roberto and MTV
 - Geraldo Rivera as babysitter

I'll tell you what I think helps, but first,
some additional subjective impressions
from my years of working with
disadvantaged young mothers



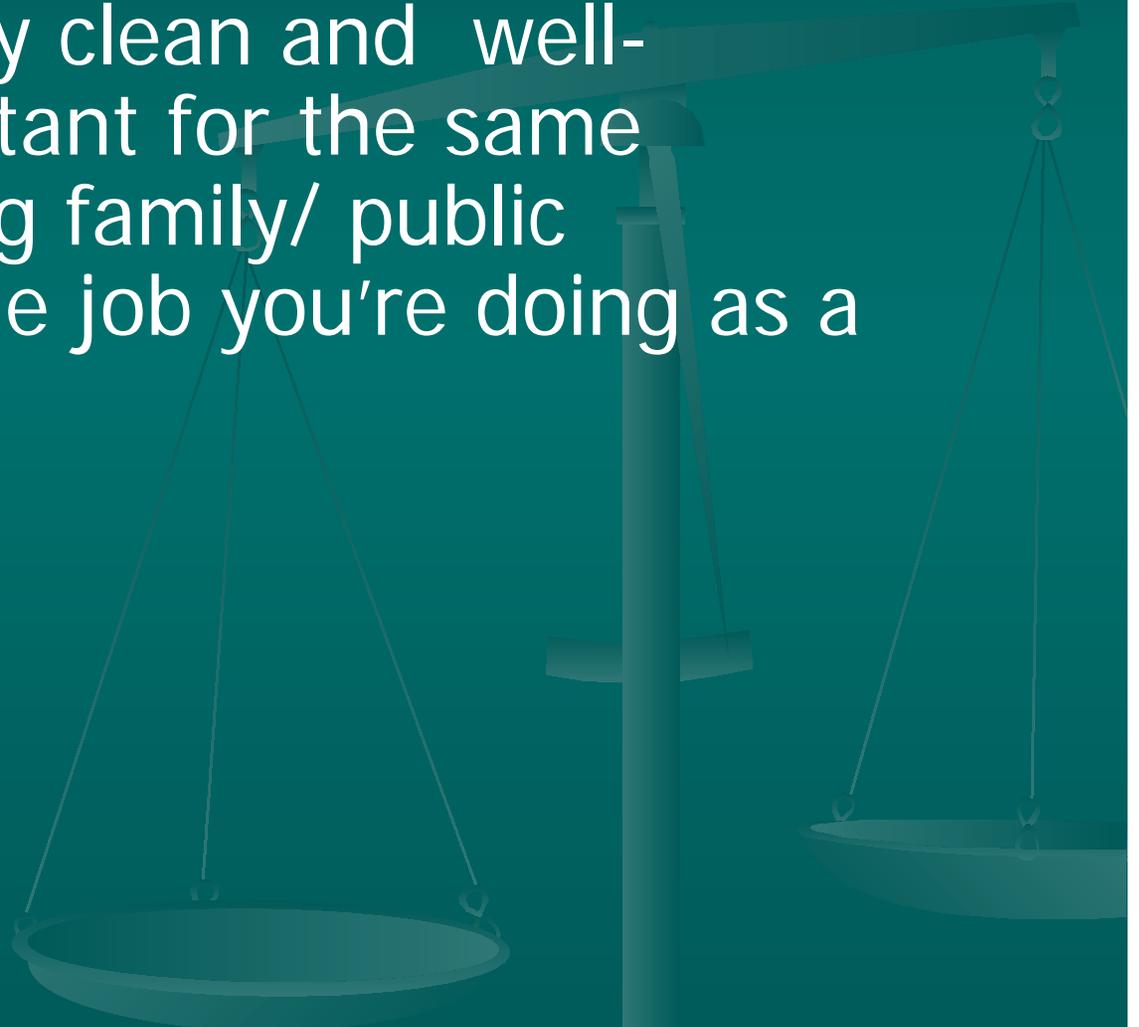
Expectations about baby's behavior

- Babies who “fall out” in public make their mothers look like “bad mothers”. Young mothers are particularly sensitive to this, since there's a stereotype about their ability to parent, anyway.



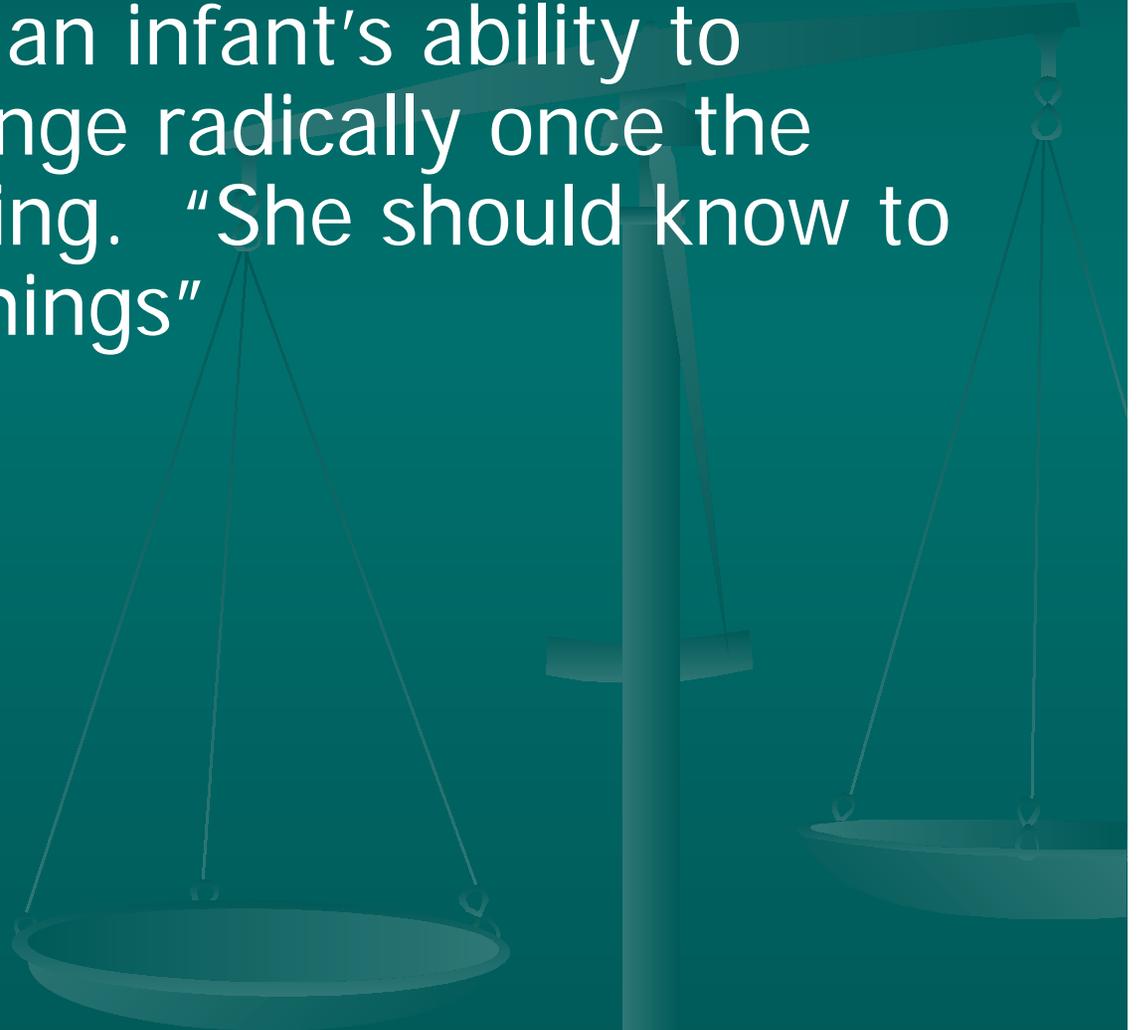
Expectations about baby's behavior

- Keeping the baby clean and well-dressed is important for the same reason - avoiding family/ public disapproval of the job you're doing as a mother.



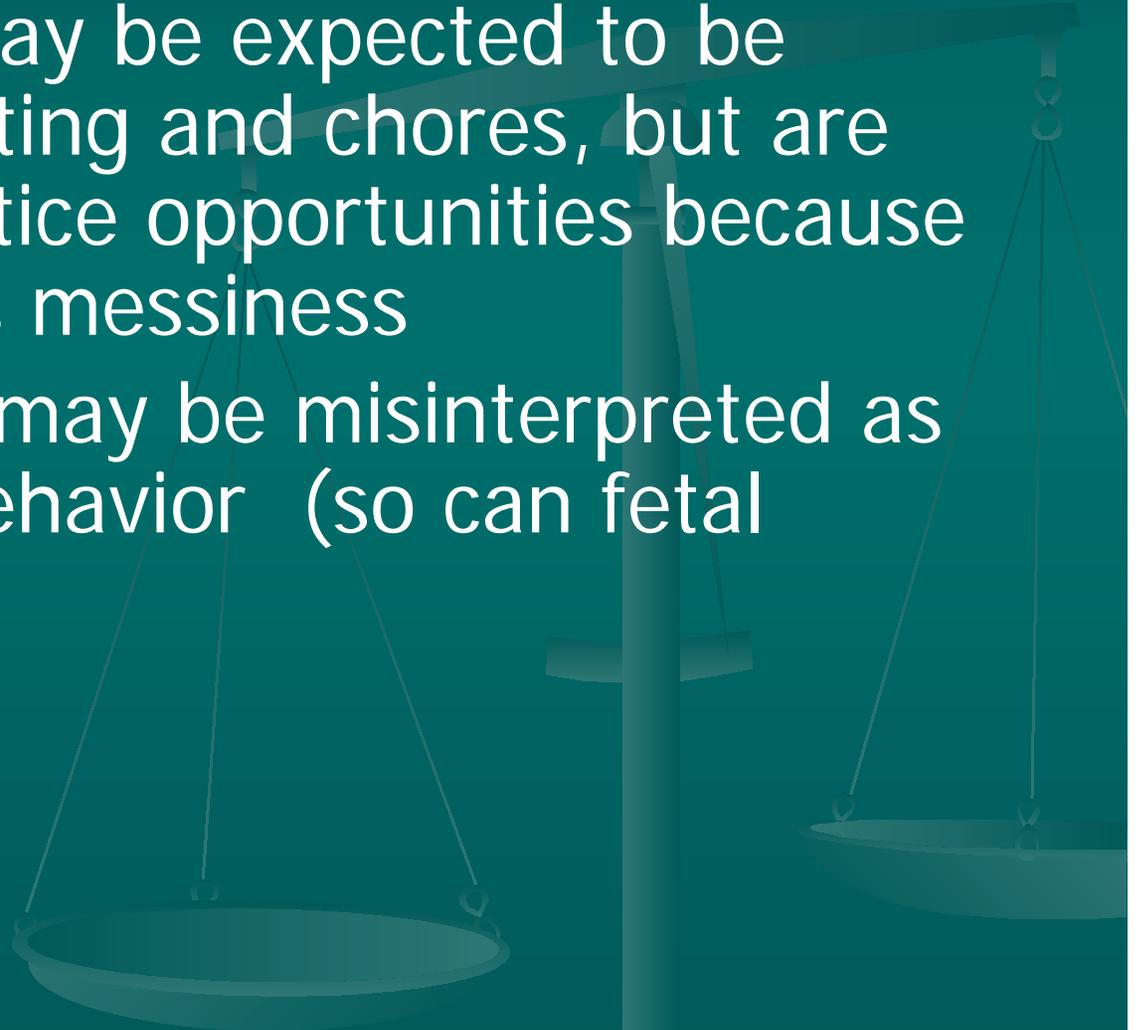
Expectations about baby's behavior

- Expectations for an infant's ability to behave may change radically once the baby starts walking. "She should know to stay out of my things"



Expectations about baby's behavior

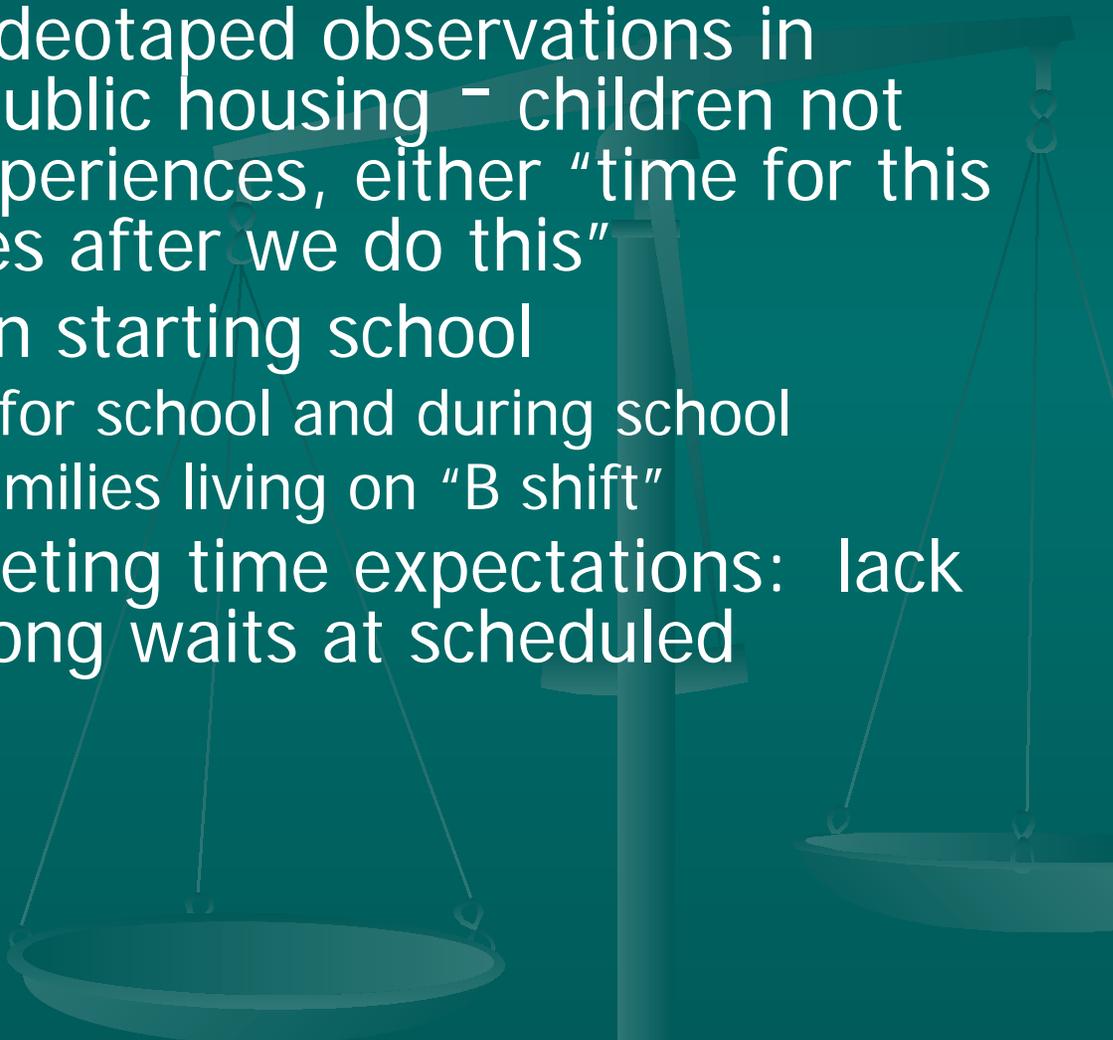
- Older children may be expected to be competent at eating and chores, but are deprived of practice opportunities because learning involves messiness
- Illness behavior may be misinterpreted as intentional misbehavior (so can fetal kicks!)



Relationships with professionals

- May be recapitulations of dysfunctional relationships with parents or other authority figures
 - What does she think she needs to do to get my attention?
 - What response is she expecting from me?
- The billiard ball metaphor – or why moms and their boyfriends can't stick together to work out minor conflicts

Time

- Dolores Norton's videotaped observations in Chicago high-rise public housing - children not exposed to time experiences, either "time for this now" or "that comes after we do this"
 - A deficit for children starting school
 - Rigid time structure for school and during school
 - "A shift" hours for families living on "B shift"
 - Real barriers to meeting time expectations: lack of transportation, long waits at scheduled appointments
- 

Now, my recommendations



Caution:
Strength of
evidence is
mostly "clinical
impressions"

Building respectful partnerships

- The greatest impact I may have on a teen mother (or father, when involved) is demonstrating that there's another kind of relationship to have with authority figures than the kind she's used to having
 - She doesn't need to be outrageous to get my attention.
 - We work toward her goals, not just mine
 - I offer choices, when realistically available, but am clear about who owns the consequences
 - I try hard to catch her doing something right
 - My strategy doesn't always work!

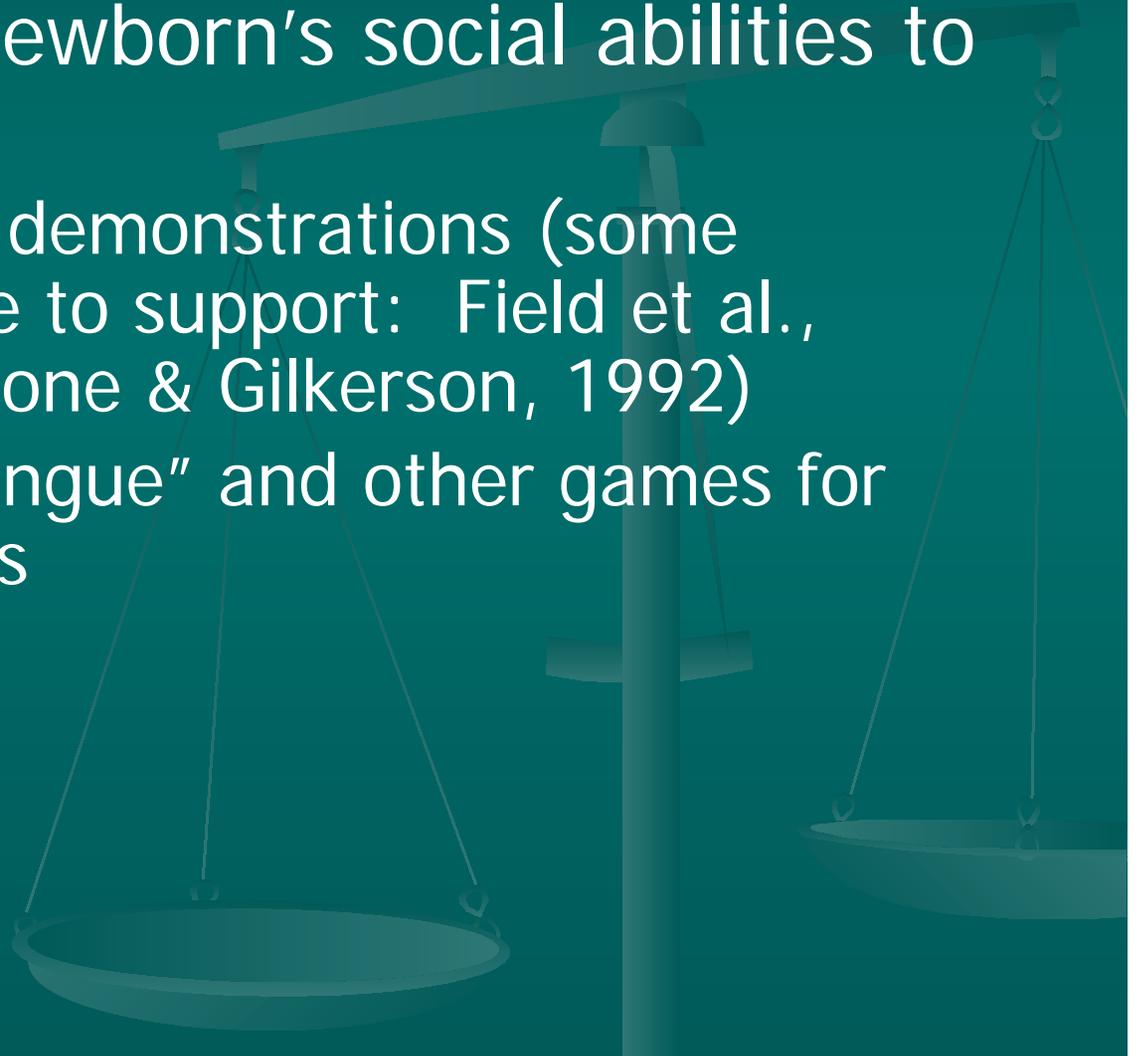
Facilitating positive feedback from the baby

- Cognitive reappraisal of “the baby’s being mean”
 - Understand baby’s perspective
 - Teach mom to recognize illness, fatigue, boredom, overload and hunger behaviors for what they are



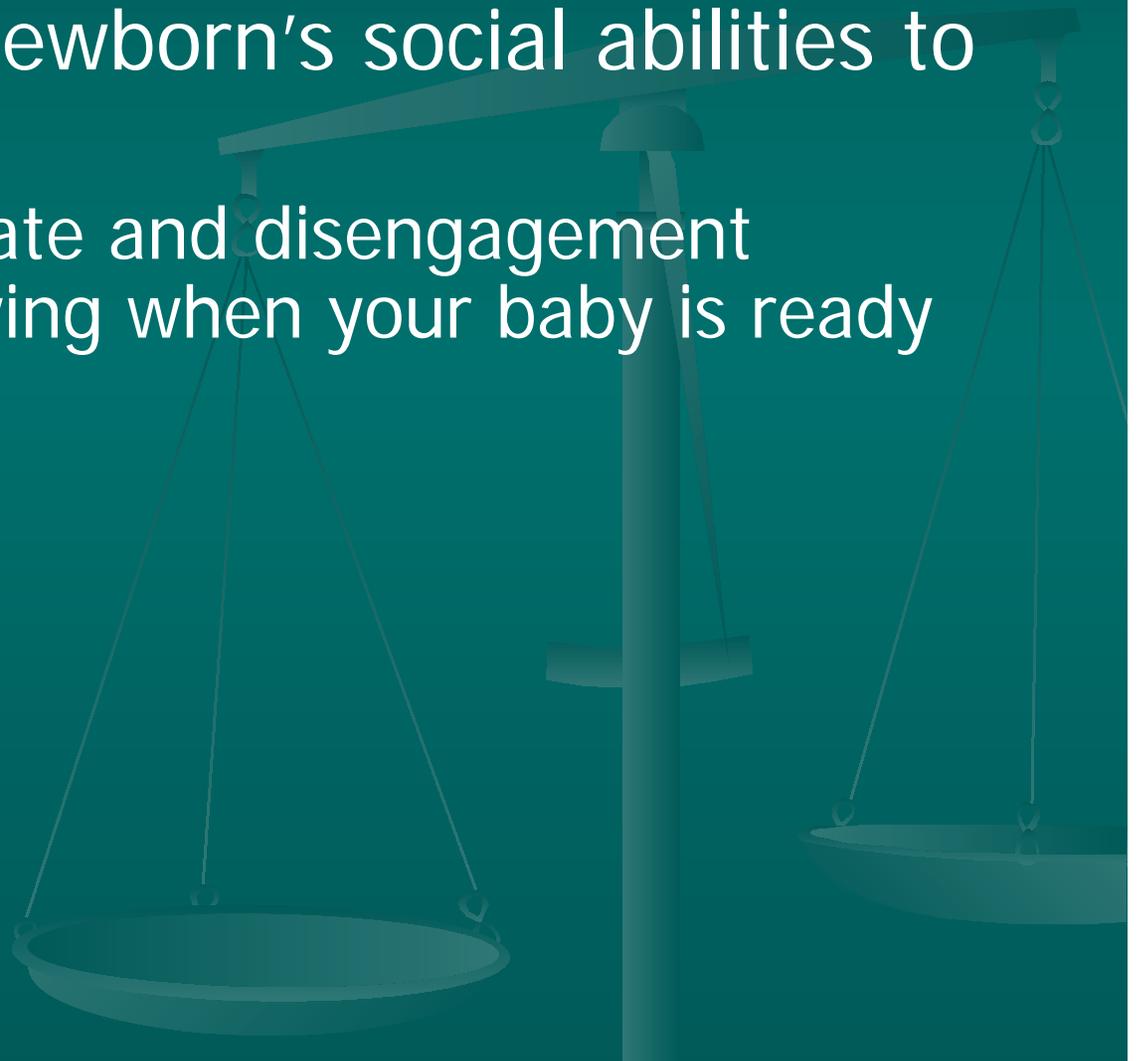
Facilitating positive feedback from the baby

- Demonstrating newborn's social abilities to parents
 - Brazelton / MABI demonstrations (some research evidence to support: Field et al., 1978, 1982; Cardone & Gilkerson, 1992)
 - "Stick out your tongue" and other games for very young babies



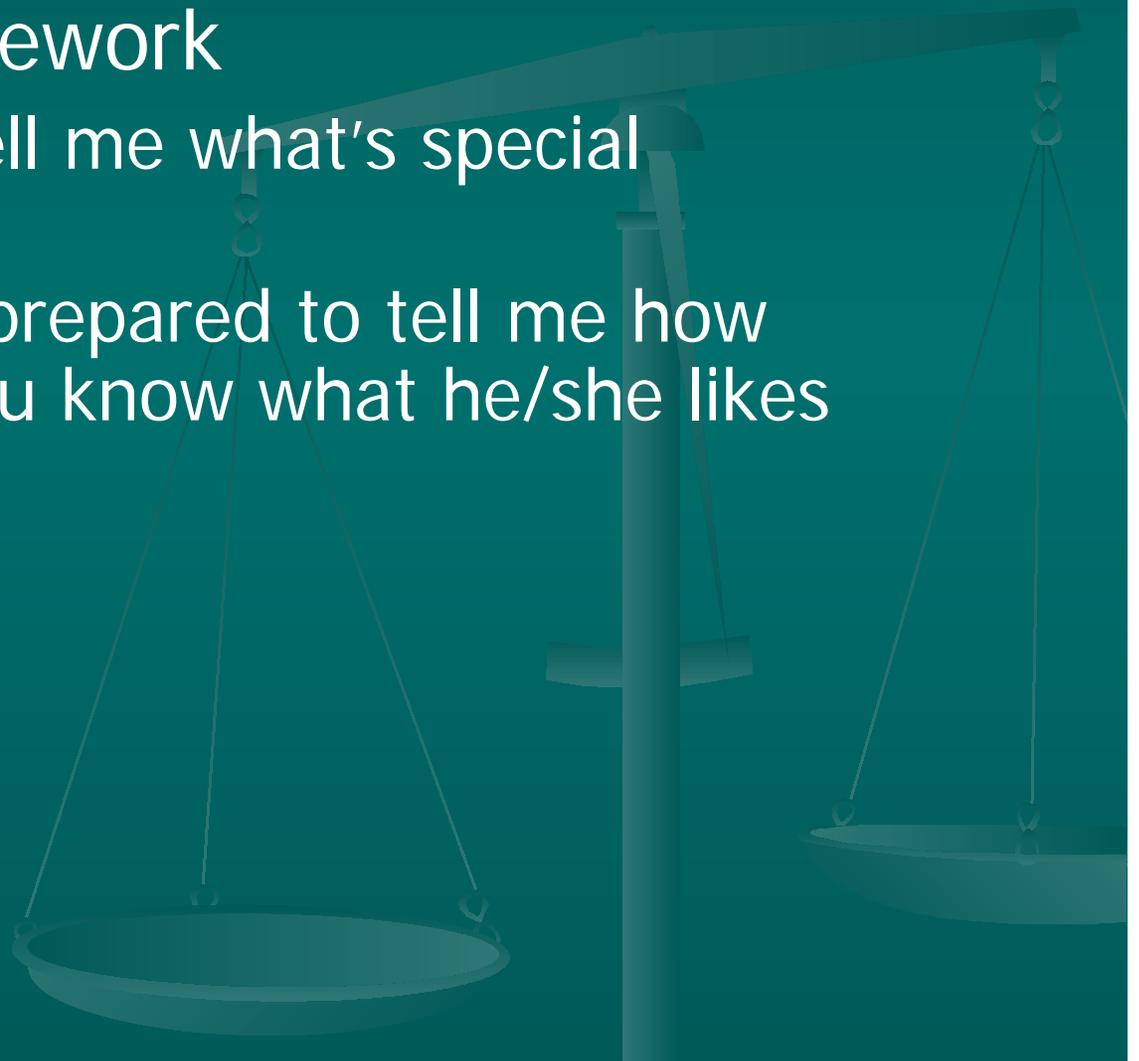
Facilitating positive feedback from the baby

- Demonstrating newborn's social abilities to parents
 - Recognition of state and disengagement behaviors - knowing when your baby is ready to play



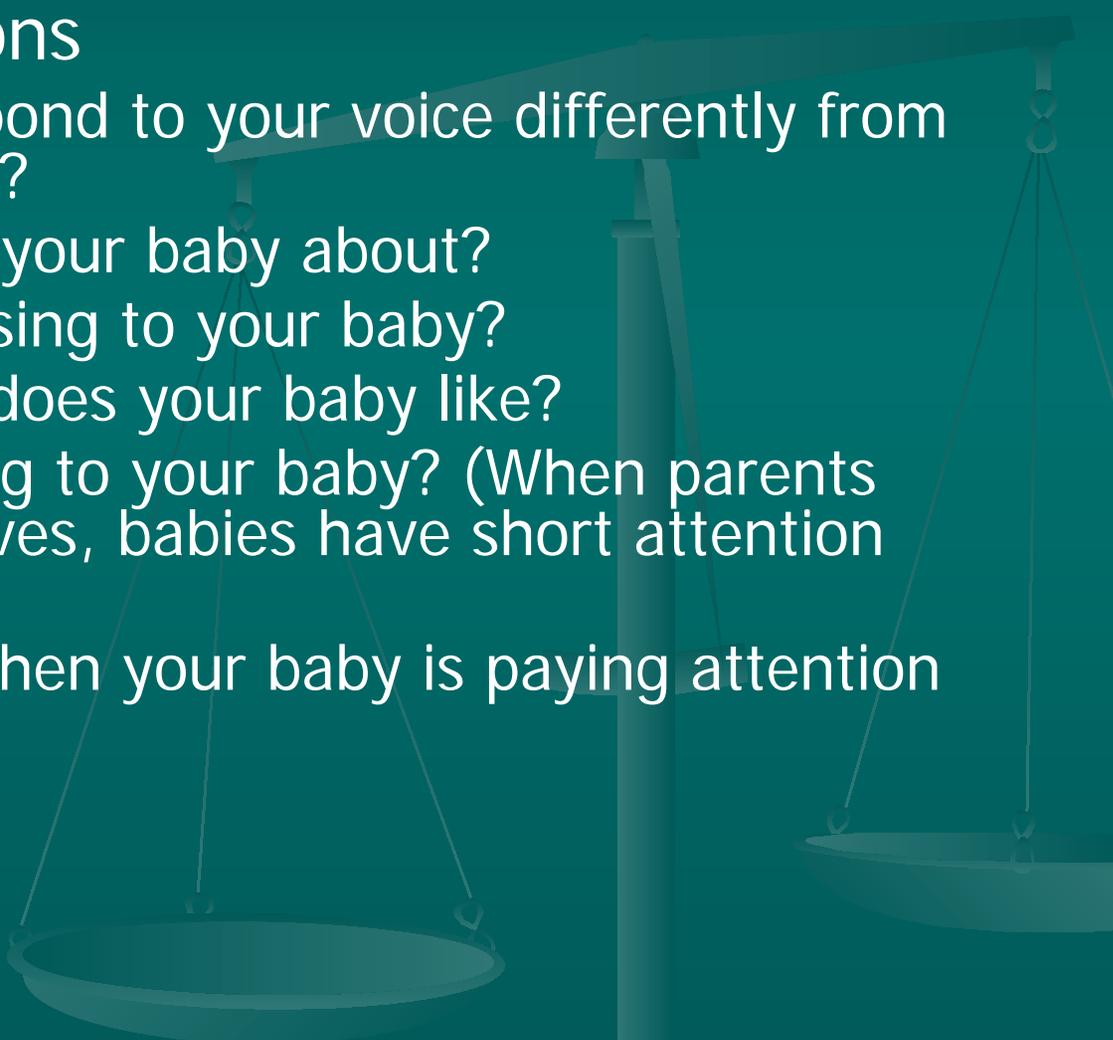
Facilitating positive feedback from the baby

- Postpartum homework
 - Be prepared to tell me what's special about your baby
 - In particular, be prepared to tell me how your baby lets you know what he/she likes



Facilitating positive feedback from the baby

■ Postpartum questions

- Does your baby respond to your voice differently from anybody else's voice?
 - What do you talk to your baby about?
 - What songs do you sing to your baby?
 - What kind of music does your baby like?
 - What are you reading to your baby? (When parents read poorly themselves, babies have short attention spans.)
 - How do you know when your baby is paying attention to you?
- 

My favorite diagnostic question for the mother / infant relationship

- Tell me what's special about your baby?
 - (Broad smile from mother). "Everything is special - she's mine! She's starting to smile, and she really loves her bath, and she likes it when I sing silly songs to her."
 - (Flat affect from mother). "I dunno. He doesn't cry much."
- Which mother do you think is getting positive reinforcement from the relationship with her baby?

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- Norton, Dolores, PhD School of Social Service Administration, University of Chicago

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Babies can't wait!

