



Family Values

Seasons of Parenthood: Sponge

Bruce Strade, Chief Operating Officer, Lutheran Community Services Northwest

Infancy, which includes birth up to walking, is Season Two of parenthood, according to Barbara C. Unell and Jerry L Wyckoff in *The Eight Seasons of Parenthood*. This is the period of fluids, ranging from soaked diapers, runny noses to spit up. These fluids demand one thing from parents—sponges to clean them up—which is what mothers and fathers become during this season of their lives.

In the Sponge season, parents' lives inevitably become physically, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually controlled by their totally dependent infant's agenda: *Take good care of me. Absorb who I am. Meet my needs.* The baby's natural developmental growth from being a helpless, horizontal infant to becoming a vertical, mobile toddler grasping for independence creates this stage's boundaries, the beginning and ending markers.

During this season, it is easy to be used up by the baby's needs. Spontaneity goes by the wayside. The couple must work at devoting loving time and attention to each other. Forcing the time to plan special treats for themselves—making dinner dates with friends, taking the baby for long walks in the new stroller—can strengthen the new relationship as parents. What happens in this stage lays the foundation for the business of parenthood—embracing change—instead of being flattened by it.

The following is a pocket guide to the truths revealed in the Sponge season of parenthood:

- **Hang on tight.** As you take the first plunge on the roller-coaster ride of parenthood, the drop into the duties and responsibilities of caring for this new life is fast and furious. No matter how many times you've ridden the ride, its power and intensity will take you by surprise.
- **Don't worry about your hair.** You may feel that you've lost yourself during this drop into parenthood. But while you're in this season, your goal is to adjust to the feel of the ride. Stay in the moment with your baby. You'll never look better than when you're soaking wet and smothered with love.
- **Holding hands is hard.** Despite the fact that you're on the ride together with your partner, hanging on to each other is hard to do as you make this plunge. You may find that letting out screams at the same time brings you closer together.
- **Keep a hankie handy!** Expect to get wet in this stage of the ride. No one reaches the next turn dry and unchanged.

The diapers and milk will continue to stain your life as your baby defines your daily schedule during this stage. When your baby becomes upright and mobile and begins to explore his/her world, you will be catapulted into Season Three. Calm is relative. Enjoy it while you have it.

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Portland Office
605 S.E. 39th Avenue, Portland, OR 97214
503-231-7480

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