

FOR OUR BABIES

**Ending the Invisible Neglect
of America's
Infants**



A Discussion Guide
for Book Groups and Classes

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***Version 1
10.1.13***

Special Thanks to For Our Babies Volunteers, Jenna McAnulty and Jean Kurnik, for assisting in writing and editing this first version of the Discussion Guide for Book Groups and Classes



For Our Babies: Ending the Invisible Neglect of America's Infants

A Discussion Guide

Hello Fellow Advocates for Babies!

Thank you so much for your interest in leading a discussion group for Dr. Ron Lally's new book, *For Our Babies: Ending the Invisible Neglect of America's Infants*.

This guide is intended to help you lead a fun "book-club-style" discussion on this new book. The questions and activities presented here are merely suggestions. Feel free to use whichever questions and activities you like and leave the rest. Also please create your own.

The goal of ***For Our Babies*** is to create positive change for babies. In addition to enjoying your discussions, we hope your book group will think about ways to promote healthier beginnings for babies in the United States including sharing information about this book and the ***For Our Babies Campaign***.

Have fun!

~The For Our Babies Team



Discussion Questions and Activities

What follows are more questions and activities than you could cover in an evening, so if you're doing a one-night discussion group, pick a question or exercise or two from each of the chapters of the book. Some exercises work better in-person than via a virtual discussion, but be playful and have fun! Be sure to include time to think about how to "Get Involved" with the *For Our Babies Campaign*. There are ideas included in the informational flyer and at the end of this Guide.

Unless your group is less than 5 people, we recommend spending some time in pairs or groups of 3 in order for everyone to have an opportunity to add their voice to the discussion. You can choose from questions and activities to facilitate your discussions.

Some groups may choose to take notes. Please don't hesitate to send any feedback, comments or ideas, (and of course photos of your group!) to us at followus@forourbabies.org.

We are looking forward to hearing from you!



For Our Babies: Ending the Invisible Neglect of America's Infants

Introduction:

Question 1: Are you surprised that a book like this has been written?

Question 2: Why do you think this book needed to be written at this point in time?

Question 3: How does the timing of this publication affect its meaning to you in your community or the nation as a whole? Do you agree that we are at a "crossroads" when it comes to the care of our nation's babies?

Activity 1: Take a moment to check in with your group. Ask each person to introduce themselves and share one reason why they were curious to read this book and perhaps how it is relevant to them.



Part I: Recognizing the Importance of Support for Babies and Their Families

Chapter 1. A Society Changes: Its Thinking and Policies Don't

Question 1: What do you think of, when you imagine a “typical” American family today?

Question 2: If you are a working parent with a child, who took care of your infant and how did you make the decision of who that would be?

Question 3: Think about whether or not your family, or families you know, fit into the description of the changing American family (Pages 4-12 in Chapter 1). How does the structure of these families, affect their needs? How are our social, medical, and education services meeting (or not) those needs?

Question 4: What does it mean to be a child in America today? How do you define or describe childhood?

Question 5: Think about your childhood, or your children, or children you work with or know. How do adults' images of those children affect public policy and the way we plan for their futures?

Question 6: What do you think about the argument that, even though informal support structures have been gradually diminishing for parents and babies, and even though other industrialized nations have found it necessary to respond to vast social changes by increasing their involvement with families, American families and America in general should be very careful of governmental involvement in family affairs?

Question 7: Some people oppose what they call “Government Entitlements”, ensuring “availability of free or affordable health care services to all pregnant women” and feel that providing such “Entitlements” will diminish independence, as President Nixon believed in 1971? Where do you stand? Do you agree or disagree that asking individual families to solve their own problems is asking too much and that the problems of modern families “exceed the realm of the personal solutions?”

Activity 1: Role Play taking sides in Question 6 or Question 7 and debating the issues. Have someone take notes. What were the strongest arguments made on either side? What arguments seem most salient in American culture today? Are these arguments still valid or are they out dated? Why or Why not?



Chapter 2. How the New Brain Research Changes Everything

Question 1: What is your reaction to the “social womb” concept (Page 14-15 Chapter 1 and on Page 43 Chapter 2)? Discuss your thoughts on this notion that a baby needs a “social womb” to both protect and inform it and also that society as a whole will benefit from providing this “social womb” to babies.

Question 2: Are you surprised with the information on the infant brain? What is your biggest takeaway? How might this change how you perceive/work with/care for/understand babies, their parents, and early educators?

Question 3: How would you respond to what we know now? Or, how have you responded after learning about the infant brain research?

Question 4: How does the idea of the “Vulnerable Competent Learner” fit with your experience of children?

Question 5: How can we bring what we know about babies’ brains to a wider audience? How do we share it with everyone from our neighbors, to our policy makers?

Question 6: If as a nation we viewed an infant’s “prolonged helplessness: that early period of vulnerable brain growth” as a strength rather than a weakness, how might this thinking inform advocacy efforts for the need for paid leave for instance?

Activity 1: Draw a picture of what you see as a healthy, supportive social womb, or environment, for a new baby. This could be in the form of a diagram, a home, a room, or anything else that makes sense to you. How does each part of the environment impact the baby in a positive way? Share with at least one other person. This could also be done in small groups as a collaborative drawing on a poster board or even just a quick sketch on a napkin or piece of paper.



Part II: Understanding Babies' Needs

Chapter 3. Supporting Growth During Preconception and Pregnancy

Question 1: Do you think most women of child bearing age in your community are aware that the health and condition of a woman even before conception plays a crucial role in the development of a healthy baby? Where do women in your community get information about their health and reproductive health in particular? How could this be improved?

Question 2: What are your thoughts/reactions to information on pre-pregnancy? What has changed or should be changed with this new knowledge?

Question 3: If you had a baby, did you start taking prenatal vitamins before (and/or while) trying to conceive? Did you have medical advisement/support during preconception?

Question 4: If you had a baby, what kind of prenatal health care did you have access to? Was it easy/difficult to access? Were you satisfied with it? How might it improve?

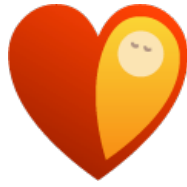
Question 5: If preconception services were made available in the US, do you believe women would utilize them? What kinds of systems might need to be in place to ensure effectiveness?

Activity 1: Take a look at the three types of support for prenatal development that most European Countries have instituted (listed on Page 30) and then compare that with the lack of prenatal care in the United States. Make a list of all the pros and cons of instituting these three types of supports in America.

Activity 2: Search online for preconception policies and practices in other countries—particularly Europe and Asia. See if you can find one that you think is especially thoughtful, or complete. Compare it with what we have in the U.S. Talk with a few others: Why do you think we resist this kind of support in the U.S.? How do you think we could shift this thinking?

Activity 3: Take a look at your own health insurance plan, or examine some brochures or websites. Are there any preconception services available? Which ones? How much do they cost? What is missing?

Activity 4: Share your story (from question #4 or any other that comes up related to this chapter of the book) with one or more people. Have someone record your story and send it



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A CALL FOR BETTER BEGINNINGS

to www.forourbabies.org.



Chapter 4: What a Newborn Needs from Birth to 9 Months: The Bonding Period

Question 1: What do you think goes on in a typical American baby's "social womb" during the first 30 days of life? What about the first 3 months? 6 months?

Question 2: How do you see the U.S. social policies affecting the social womb?

Question 3: How big of a factor do you see paid leave playing in the first few months of a baby's life? What about for their family?

Question 4: If you cared for a newborn, how did you feel when you first went home? Did a nurse/expert visit your home within the first month after going home with your newborn? Did you know where to go or who to contact if you needed help (whether medical, developmental, breast feeding, etc.)? Was there anything you wished had been different for you? Can you imagine how home visits might have made a difference for you in the early stages?

Question 5: If you were working and had a baby, did you get maternity/paternity leave from work? Was it paid? What is your story?

Question 6: If you have supervised employees who went on parental leave, what were some of the arrangements, challenges, requests, etc.?

Activity 1: Make a list of sights, sounds, feelings, and tastes that a baby (could be one you have cared for or one you imagine) might experience in their first day of life. What about on their first day of childcare?

Activity 2: Share your story (from question #5 or any other that comes up related to this chapter of the book) with one or more people. Have someone record your story and send it to www.forourbabies.org.



Chapter 5: What the Infant Needs from 7 to 18 Months: The Exploration Period

Question 1: If you used child care, what is/was your child care arrangement? Were you satisfied? What would have been your choice if you can access any child care and without financial constraint?

Question 2: If you have used child care, when did you start to plan for child care (before/during/after) pregnancy? What was the planning process? What variables did you have to weight/balance?

Question 3: What is your response to the idea that babies have their own learning agenda? Is this similar or different from what you knew/know/practice? How so?

Question 4: Why do you think our society puts such a low value on the worth of Infant/Toddler Teachers, not considering them as professionals in their field and as not teaching anything?

Activity 1: List all of the ways you can imagine that the high turnover (41%) of Early Childhood teachers can be detrimental to a child's developmental outcome.

Activity 2: Record and share your personal story related to looking for, affording or keeping high quality childcare for an infant (perhaps as a parent or a teacher or an advocate or administrator etc). Remember to send it to www.forourbabies.org!



Chapter 6: What the Toddler Needs from 15 to 36 Months: The Stage of Self-Definition

Question 1: Have you had experiences with interacting with children that lack executive function skills? How might the child/children benefit from better executive function development?

Question 2: Did your child/children have many/regular opportunities to play/interact with other children? What kind of relationships were established, or if not, what would you have liked to see happen?

Question 3: Consider the gravity—the importance—of developing a social conscience, and a sense of morality. How do you believe these traits are formed? What experiences, words, or relationships shape them?

Activity 1: Make a list of typical toddler “misbehaviors”. Now make a list of adult “misbehaviors”. These could be big or small—socially inappropriate, all the way up to violent, or criminal activity. Do you see any connections between the two lists? What are our options as a society for curbing harmful adult behavior? Which seems more effective?

Activity 2: Record and share your personal story related to looking for, affording or keeping high quality childcare for a toddler (perhaps as a parent or a teacher or an advocate or administrator etc). Remember to send it to www.forourbabies.org!



Chapter 7: Recommended Services for Babies and their Families

Question 1: Is there a particular development period (*preconception, pregnancy, 0-9 months, 7-18 months, 15-36 months*) that resonates most with you? Why?

Question 2: Do you think that infant care/education should be a public good, like Kindergarten? Why/Why not?

Question 3: When it comes to needs—which developmental period (*preconception, pregnancy, 0-9 months, 7-18 months, 15-36 months*) seems the “simplest” to address?

Question 4: When it comes to needs—which developmental period (*preconception, pregnancy, 0-9 months, 7-18 months, 15-36 months*) seems the most challenging to address, or for our society to agree to address?

Question 5: When it comes to needs—which developmental period (*preconception, pregnancy, 0-9 months, 7-18 months, 15-36 months*) seems the most challenging to address, or for our society to agree to address?

Activity 1: Share a challenging experience that applies to one of the developmental periods listed. Share how you worked through it, or what the outcome was.

Activity 2: Research on-line opposing political positions, or programmatic solutions on one of the 20 recommendations listed on Pages 79-85. Discuss with one or more people in your group.



Part III: Why It Makes Sense to Help Families Meet the Needs of their Babies

Chapter 8: Economic Benefit of Investment in U.S. Babies

Question 1: Is there a particular economic benefit that you connect with or are experienced with?

Question 2: Identify the top 2 economic benefits that you think are most significant and why.

Question 3: Why would you invest in babies?

Question 4: Consider the “economic perspective” for taking better care of our nation’s infants and toddlers (*lower health-care costs, increased productivity, improved retention, healthier workforce*).

Activity 1: Take a look at the Heckman Scale on Page 98. Try to estimate the percent of the U.S. Federal Budget that is spent on each age group. Then find out how much the U.S. actually spends on each age group listed. How close were you? Were you surprised? Will this affect your future voting on budget proposals and proposed cuts? Do you think this information will effect others’ voting? Why or why not?

Activity 2: Practice persuading others with the facts: Role play a discussion where several people are arguing the economic benefits of investing in babies (helping each other make a strong case) and one or two play hard to convince.



Chapter 9: A Final Message

Question 1: What is your biggest takeaway from the book? What information was most poignant to you?

Question 2: How has your perspective on preconception, pregnancy, babies, and caregivers changed? What would you like to do with this information?

Question 3: How do you want to share/spread this information/message?

Question 4: What actions can you take?

Activity 1: Write down one goal you would like to set to improve the lives of babies in the U.S. (**ideas: write to your congressman, thank your children's caregivers, share the *For Our Babies Campaign/book, etc***) Share it with the group, or someone next to you—don't forget to describe *how* you will accomplish your goal, and *why* it is important to you.



Getting Involved

The second page of the attached ***For Our Babies*** information flyer (also downloadable on our website www.forourbabies.org) lists examples of ways to get involved in the campaign.

In addition, you can reach out to your friends and colleagues to share the ***For Our Babies Campaign***. You can also like us on Facebook and follow us on twitter.

However you choose to get involved with creating change on behalf of babies, please write to the ***For Our Babies Campaign*** (followus@forourbabies.org) and let us know what you are up to and how we can continue to support you in making the future brighter for babies!



Ways to Organize Your Discussion Group

There are lots of options for organizing and running your discussion group. Simple ways include:

- **Virtual Book Club:** Use a free conference calling service like freeconferencecall.com or talkshoe.com to hold a virtual book club over the phone.
- **Online Discussion Group:** Create a [Facebook Group](#) to hold a discussion of the book with your Facebook friends.
- **Create a Meetup Group:** Use Meetup.com to create a common interest group to discuss Dr. Lally's book!
- **At Home with Friends and Family:** Create an in-person book club in your home. Invite your friends to bring their own spoons and some snacks and make it a party!
- **At the Library:** Your local library often offers space to hold talks and events. They are also sometimes looking for interesting events to hold and promote. Check with your library to see if they have space for you to use and a bulletin board to post your event details.
- **Fundraiser:** When organizing and holding a discussion group in your home or local library, consider making it a fundraiser by asking your participants to donate to the **For Our Babies Campaign**. In exchange you can provide light refreshments (and of course facilitation of the book discussion).

Ways to Promote Your Discussion Group

Advocates for babies have had enough! It is time to end the neglect! Here are some easy ways for you to find people who want to promote better beginnings for babies and their families and promote your event:

- **Facebook:** Post your book discussion group details as a status update on Facebook or create a Facebook event.
- **Eventbrite:** Eventbrite is an online registration system. There is an option in Eventbrite where you can organize and offer a free event at no cost to you. For in-person events, people can "find events" on Eventbrite as well.
- **Talkshoe:** Talkshoe is a telephone service that enables anyone to easily create, join, or listen live to conversations and discussions. If you make your call "public", your call is searchable on Talkshoe and people can join the call live or listen to the recording.
- **Flyers:** If you are interested in sharing your group discussion with the world at large, consider creating a flyer and posting details about your in-person or virtual book discussion at your local library, coffee shop, yoga or fitness studio.
- **Email:** And of course, there's email. Why not shoot off an email to your friends and colleagues and let them know what you're up to? Be sure to let them know books are available on Amazon both in Kindle version and Paperback.