

Planning for Baby – Scams

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What Baby Doesn't Need



They appear like magic. The mailers, magazines, catalogs, e-mail, and phone calls multiply as your baby's arrival date gets closer. It seems that the marketers and con artists know your baby is on its way almost as soon as you do. Everyone has something to sell to make your baby smarter, healthier, safer, or wealthier than all the other babies.

Deals for products that sound too good to be true probably are. You will also get many coupons and specials on photos, etc. Remember that a coupon only saves you money if you would normally purchase the item.

The Social Security Scams

The fraudulent agencies use official-sounding names like Federal Document Services or National Records Service and offer to handle clerical details of getting a Social Security number for your baby. The fee is only around \$15. They don't tell you that getting a Social Security number for your child is free. You will not only lose the \$15, you could also be giving the company information that should be kept private. What do you get for your \$15? The company fills out the application, returns it to you, and tells you to take it to your local Social Security office and wait in line. Most hospitals offer to submit a Social Security number application to the Social Security Administration when they process the information for a birth certificate-for free.



Watch for any mailings or e-mail that says your baby is eligible to receive refunds from the manufacturers of baby food, formula, or other children's products, due to settlements of lawsuits. The catch in this scam is that you are required to provide your child's Social Security number. Do not provide this information, if you do, it will almost surely be used illegally.

Child Genius

According to experts on child psychology and brain development, there is no video, classical music CD, flashcards, computer program, or toy that can "boost" your baby's intelligence. Nothing beats simple human interaction, especially parent-child interaction, to increase child brain development in that

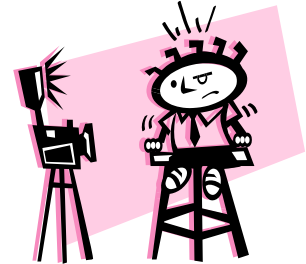
critical zero to 3-years-old period. Put the money you would have spent on some “genius baby” computer program into a savings plan for your child’s college education. The best way to build your child’s self-esteem is with love and attention.



Modeling and Photography Scams

It is so flattering. The modeling agency wants your child to be a model. Who could resist? Maybe you should. Watch for the red flags that indicate you could become part of a modeling scam. Watch out:

- if you’re asked to pay
- if the agency insists on professional photos for very young children
- if the agency guarantees work or a certain income
- if you’re approached out of the blue



A legitimate modeling agency never asks for up-front fees; it invests in a child’s career and then takes professional photos; a couple of color snapshots are enough. Unless you live in a big city, such as New York or Los Angeles, there is not going to be enough work available to bring in the big bucks. Most child models are “discovered” after their parents have sent photos to a reputable agency. If someone stops you and/or your child in the mall, places an ad in a newspaper, or sends you a letter stating that your child has been selected, be suspicious. While some reputable agents find kids this way, it’s rare.

You should also watch out for specials on photos that require you to sign up for many sittings. Do you really want to go to that photographer or studio every year for the next eight years to have a birthday photo taken? Will the photographer even be in business in eight years? The companies with these long-term contracts count on the fact that most parents will never come back for all the sittings. It is now possible to get baby pictures very reasonably so check around before purchasing a contract.

This is one of a set of fact sheets for *Planning for Baby*. You may also want to see the series *Children and Family Finances*.

This fact sheet was revised from *Planning for Baby – Consumer Issues* by Hayhoe, C., Jamison, S. Dillard, A. F., and Chase, M.

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