Free care to non-Hep C Anti-D women denied

Unsettling news about soothers

Pacifier use can curb development in boys by stopping the mirroring of facial expressions

ANTHONY KING
SOOTHERS MAY calm tantrums in a moment, but excessive use could cause lasting harm.

Studies of US and French children have found that soothers may curb emotional development in boys. Research on children and adults also found that a poor score card in emotional maturity in adults could be linked to heavy soother use as a young child.

“We can talk to infants, but at least initially they aren’t going to understand what the words mean,” said Dr Paula Niedenthal, a psychologist at the University of Wisconsin who led the study.

“So the way we communicate with infants at first is by using the tone of our voice and our facial expressions,” she said.

Infants rely on reading facial expressions for learning and part of this learning is copying those facial expressions. With a pacifier in their mouth, a baby is less able to mirror those expressions and the emotions they represent.

By making the same face as their parent, an infant can learn about their feelings. In fact, nerves from the brain cause facial expressions, but nerves from the face also go back to the brain.

“Boys that use soother for a longer period of time showed less facial mimicry,” said Dr Niedenthal.

“The problem is still only linked to soother use during daytime, not during sleep. This is the first such study to link soother sucking with psychological consequences.”

“Parents should consider why they are introducing the [soother] and when they are using it and whether it is for the child or for themselves,” added Dr Niedenthal.

People all ages often mimic the expressions and body language of those around them. When we mimic somebody else, we have a greater appreciation for how they are feeling. Soother use surrounds the mouth and disrupts a child’s facial mimicry. It also blocks adults from seeing a child’s cries. It also blocks adults from seeing how a child is reacting and prevents them mirroring these reactions.

The effect was seen only in boys, not girls. The researchers speculate that parents could be compensating with daughters by assisting them more in expression and emotional learning or girls themselves may be using soothers less at certain times.

“They are girls just developing fast enough that, by the time they start to use [soothers], certain kinds of behaviour are already in place. Mimmicry and eye contact, for example, occur early in girl’s,” said Dr Niedenthal.

The use of soothers is already controversial. The World Health Organisation recommends limiting their use, partly to promote successful breastfeeding, partly because of a link between soother use and middle ear infections and dental abnormalities.

However, some medical groups recommend their use during sleep in the first year of life as a preventative measure against sudden infant death syndrome.

The study was reported in the current issue of the journal Basic and Applied Social Psychology.

Hidden Hearing Heroes awarded for selfless contribution to society

DICK AHLSTROM
THE SELFLESS contribution made to society by Ireland’s deaf and hard of hearing community was celebrated yesterday at the Hidden Hearing Heroes Awards.

The awards celebrate those people who support their community, workplace or family in an exceptional way.

The awards programme is run by Hidden Hearing with the support of the Irish Deaf Society.

Donohue presented the awards yesterday in Dublin.

Members of the public are invited to nominate a hero who they feel deserves recognition for their contribution.

The winners this year came from Dublin, Offaly, Cork, Wexford and Roscommon.

The 2012 award winners are:

- Orla O’Sullivan (Cork), workplace award
- Dominic McGea (Dublin), social contribution award
- Jian Cradden (Celbridge), media award
- Patrick Conroy (Roscommon), youth award
- Gene Barry (Birr), grandparent award
- Ron Nolen (Wexford), sportsperson award
- Killian McDonnell (Dublin), student award
- Irish Deaf Woman’s Group, organisation award for its 20 years in supporting deaf women
- Des O’Callaghan (Dublin), lifetime achievement award

Unhealthy ageing a cause for concern

GENEVIEVE CARBERY

THE NUMBER of “healthy life years” a person had was becoming a major issue of concern to policymakers as people lived longer, a professor of geriatric medicine has said.

In Ireland a woman aged 65 would live on average for 20 more years but 10 of these would be “healthy lives” without cognitive or physical disability, said Dr Rose Anne Kenny, principal investigator of the Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (Tilda), said.

“Unhealthy ageing is a cause for concern.”

Three-quarters of older people who were not aware that they had irregular heart fibrillation were at risk of stroke, she said.

Addressing the meeting on living longer and healthier was New York Times best-selling author Dr Chris Crowley.

Dr Crowley said 70 per cent of age-related diseases could be avoided with behaviour changes, said Dr Kenny.

Serious training was “almost the only way to overcome osteoporosis”, he said.

Nutrition also makes an enormous difference as there is a tendency towards eating “dead food” with no nutrients that have a “huge impact on making the body work right”, he said.

He also spoke of the tendency for some older people to get isolated and the negative impact this can have on ageing. “It makes a world of sense to make a conscious effort in life after you retire,” he said.