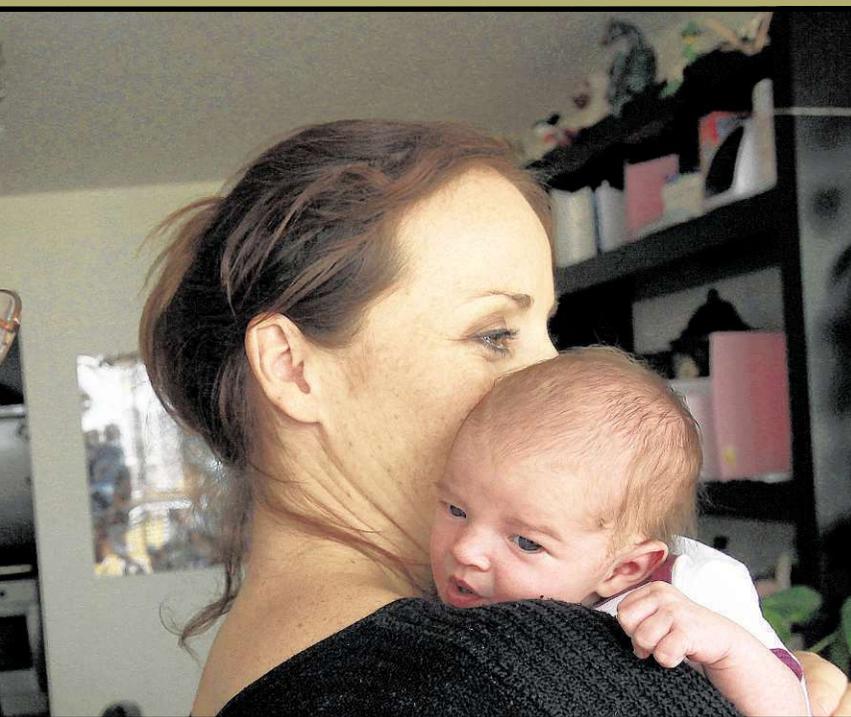
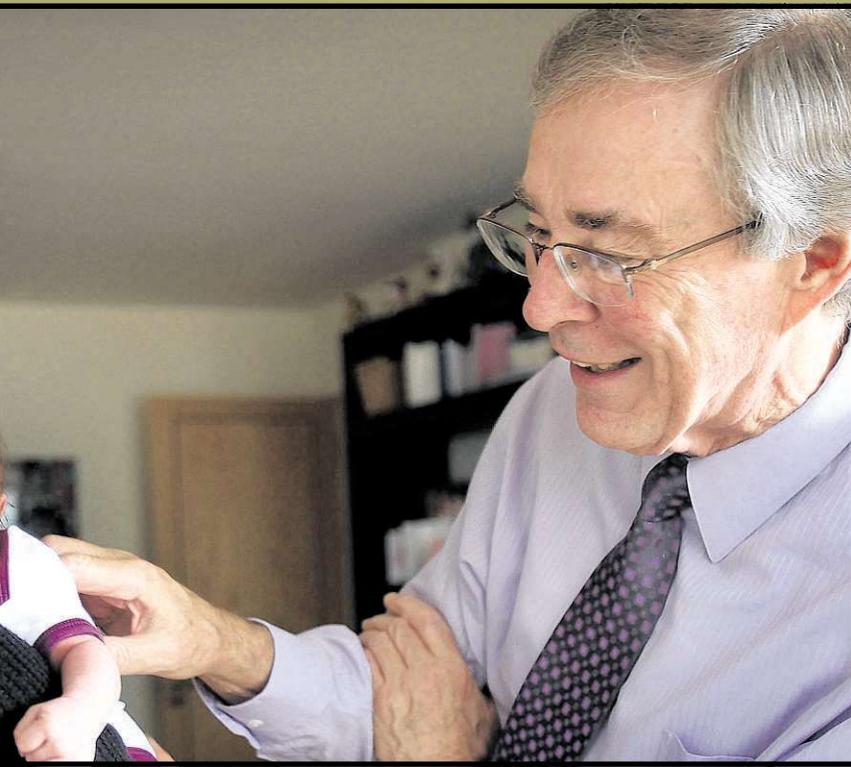


## HEALTH BOARD



Dr Kevin Nugent, director of the Brazelton Institute, Children's Hospital Boston, US, who has developed a system of "decoding" newborn babies' behaviour, with Marita Porter and her two-week-old baby Amy at her home in the Gas Works, in Dublin. Photographs: Brenda Fitzsimons

cial interaction and what is too much?

Nugent and his wife, Una, are in their homeland for a holiday, during which the Children's Research Centre in Trinity College Dublin last week marked the publication of his book in the US with a reception. It is a visually stunning collaboration with photographer Abelardo Morell who, over a year, captured images of babies as Nugent conducted NBO sessions.

The final selection of full-page black and white photographs (three of which are on these pages) illustrate infant behaviours and expressions, while the text explains what they mean in terms of a baby's growth and development.

Crying is the clearest form of communication, although it can signal different things – hunger, pain, discomfort, exhaustion – and parents have to learn to interpret. The subtlest colour change, tremors, startles, frowns, furrowing of the brow, tightening of the toes, all say something about a baby's personality and temperament.

Nugent sees so many anxious parents, he wanted to make the knowledge of NBO accessible to them – and, indeed, extended family – so that they could "pull back and enjoy their babies".

Professionals in maternity hospitals use NBO to help predict what support parents may need in those vital, early months. While they target those considered at risk, no group has a monopoly on being "at risk", he points out.

Educated professionals "can be totally knocked off their pedestals" by the arrival of a baby, who does not conform to their expectations. If they are given a chance to recover from their initial

shock, they can, with the right support, begin to develop a sense of joy and delight in the baby. "I think knowledge does not make them more anxious but liberates them."

Nugent recalls a day when a baby was being discharged from the neonatal care unit and the chief nurse called him in to examine the infant before his mother, who was there on her own, brought him home.

The baby had low muscle tone, but at one stage opened his eyes and was very responsive to Nugent. "I said to the mum, 'Would you like to call his name?' She called him and he turned and looked her in the eye. She picked up her son and kissed him and said, 'You know me!'"

"It was dramatic because I only found out afterwards that the baby had a diagnosis of Down syndrome.

"It was as if the veil was pulled away and she was seeing for the first time that she could get to know this little baby. He was not just a diagnosis, he was a person. He was no longer a baby with Downs, he was her baby. At its best, that is what NBO can do."

One study suggests that the use of NBO reduces the risk of post-natal depression – "my interpretation is that the baby joins us in the cure as a therapeutic partner", he says.

At a time when there is a proliferation of parenting gurus in the media, Nugent is very clear that he is not in the business of giving advice.

"The moment you give advice, the door is closed. You take away the opportunity for parents to grow into their own skins as parents" – taking into account their needs, their baby's needs

and the cultural preferences of the society in which they are living.

The goal is to "validate" the parents and help them see how their baby is the ultimate guide to what they should be doing – rather than the mother-in-law, sister Sue or Auntie Maureen, whose babies would have been different. "I would like parents to develop their own sense of confidence that they know their baby."

He also wants to impress on fathers, in particular, the importance of those first days, weeks and months. Some men think they will only establish a relationship with a child when they can start kicking a ball around together in the garden.

"By the time your baby speaks his first word, a lot of water has gone under the bridge," Nugent says. The possibilities for relationship-building are still there of course, but it is in the first few months that the most formative part of the relationship is consolidated.

An author of at least eight academic books, this is Nugent's first non-academic book and it is the one that has given him the greatest pleasure. He is gratified by the public response.

My only issue with the book is that it really should carry a health warning on the cover for those whose children are past the baby stage: "Opening these pages can make you seriously broody..."

*Your Baby is Speaking To You* by Dr Kevin Nugent with photographs by Abelardo Morell is published in the US by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

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**OVERSTIMULATION:** You might mistake the little boy's wide-eyed stare for a look of surprise or intense interest, but in fact he is saying "back off". A slight turning away of the head, arched eyebrows and too-wide eyes are all signs, according to Dr Kevin Nugent, that he is overstimulated. The photograph was taken as the boy responded to an overly intense face-to-face interaction with his mother. If she could read his facial cue, she would reduce the stimulation and thereby probably prevent the noisy protest that would follow if it went on any longer. Photograph: Abelardo Morell

**Black and white photographs**  
Source: *Your Baby Is Speaking To You*  
by Dr Kevin Nugent.  
Photographs: Abelardo Morell

■ Three family-friendly wellbeing and craft events go ahead in the Fingal area of North County Dublin in the next few weeks. The events give adults the opportunity to try out complementary therapies while children can enjoy craft workshops.

The venues are Skerries Community Centre on July 31st, Portmarnock Sports and Leisure Centre on August 7th, and Coláiste Choilm, Swords, on August 14th. Doors open at 11am. See [fingal.mindbodyspirit.ie](http://fingal.mindbodyspirit.ie) or tel: 086-0264262 for more details.

■ The Irish international development agency, Vita, has organised two fundraising events in Co Mayo next month.

The Great Western Greenways Cycle on Saturday, August 13th, starts in Newport and the Croagh Patrick Heritage Trail hike starts in Balla, and will be held from Friday, August 19th to Sunday, August 21st. Registration for adults is €30 per event. More details on tel: 01-8734393 or visit [vita.ie](http://vita.ie)



■ Nutritional therapist Lynda McFarland has added nutrition wall charts to her website, [lyndamcFarland.com](http://lyndamcFarland.com).

The Healthy Eating Plate chart shows food group proportions in a healthy meal, healthy eating tips and meal suggestions. The Herbs and Spice chart shows common herbs and spices used for cooking and their medicinal properties, while the Medicinal Food chart shows an A-Z of conditions and food that might help. Cost €18 per set.

■ Patients' organisations are invited to submit entries to the new category of Patient Organisation Project of the Year in the Irish Healthcare Awards.

Other categories include Nursing Project of the Year, Best Patient Lifestyle Education Project, Best Hospital Project and Lifetime Achievement Award. The closing date for receipt of submissions is August 31st.

More details on tel: 01-8176330 or e-mail [dylan.conway@imt.ie](mailto:dylan.conway@imt.ie)

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