
JUNNIFA'S OBSERVATIONS OF SOLU BIRTH TO 15 WEEKS

Observation is an important part of parenting our baby the Montessori way. We observe informally, as we go about our daily lives together, and also formally, at a dedicated time when we can record our observations. These formal observations can serve as records of our child's development.

Junnifa tried to do a comprehensive formal observation of her son Solu at least once a month. We hope that her notes give you some ideas about how she observed and what she looked for. Her observations guided her on how to prepare and modify Solu's environment and showed her what he was working on at each stage.

Observation of Month 1

Environment: A place for everything: We've created the four recommended areas: sleeping, eating, movement, and physical care or hygiene.

A place to sleep: We use a collapsible bassinet. It was easy to fit it on a table beside the bed or sometimes even on the bed. We had to travel a few times in the first two months and found that it was easy to travel with.

A place to eat: We have a chair and nursing pillow in the corner of the room. We also have a small stool for a glass of water, vitamins (for me), a book, a snack, my phone, and anything else I need while nursing.

Solu eats and sleeps on demand. In this way, we are respecting his biological rhythms while he adjusts to his new environment and his circadian rhythm. I am breastfeeding exclusively from the start. I empty one breast before switching to the other one. (It helps to note which breast the child left off at so that you know where to continue.)

I do not have to keep a schedule; he finds one on his own. He eats well and then doesn't get hungry for three hours. (Every child is different, so it's okay and may be normal if your child wants to eat more often during that first month. Meet his needs and he will gradually settle into a natural rhythm.)

A place for physical care: We set up the table so that my son can watch the adult during care and see the adult's face. We also keep the process consistent and talk him through what we are doing each time (e.g., "I am taking off your trousers. I am going to lift your leg").

Movement area: It has a small mat or mattress, a mirror, and a mobile.

Topponcino: I can't say enough about this little pillow. He sleeps on it, rests on it, and is weighed on it. Two days after he was born, about eight members of our family came to visit and he was passed from person to person and did not wake up, thanks to his topponcino. It provided another sense of order and security. It made it easy to put him down if he fell asleep while being held.

Clothing: We used cloth diapers from the start. Cloth diapers are natural and do not contain chemicals. The child is able to feel the sensation of being wet, a skill that will be helpful for toilet training later on. (I recommend a diaper service for the first two or three months if you have access to one.)

We do not swaddle Solu; we make sure he can move freely at all times. When necessary, we cover him with a light blanket or put some pants on him but always with consideration for his ability to move. Even during the first week, we observed him moving his body and were glad he had freedom to do that. Dressing for freedom allows them to use and work out their reflexes.

Newborn shirt: Instead of a onesie, we use shirts that have snaps on the sides, so we can change his diapers easily and take his shirt off without pulling it over his head or bothering his umbilical cord stub. These shirts, a diaper, and sometimes a pair of socks make up his wardrobe for this first month.

We did not use mittens. (The hands are one of the child's points of reference, starting from the womb. If you had an ultrasound during pregnancy, you might have seen the child with his hands by his face. In the first month, babies frequently continue to put their hands by their faces. Putting mittens on the child breaks this point of reference.) Solu's nails were long when we got home from the birth center. I was about to trim them on that first night when my mom told me babies shed their nails by themselves. I was wary but decided to trust her wisdom. We did not cut Solu's nails for the first two or three months, and they naturally peeled off. He never scratched himself, seemingly because his nails were so soft, or maybe he learned not to scratch himself by feeling them against his face.

Mobiles: We are using the Munari and octahedron in the first month. He loves both. Sometimes we even take the mobiles on car rides, and they help keep him calm!

High-contrast images: In addition to his Munari mobile, he also really enjoys looking at a black-and-white book.

Books: I have been reading books to him from the start. One of my favorites is *Ten Little Fingers and Ten Little Toes* by Mem Fox. He loves this book.

Music: We sing to him, play music, and take him outside to listen to sounds. I sometimes play classical music that I listened to while pregnant, and his reaction is pretty amazing. It is as though he recognizes it; he listens so calmly. It is beautiful.

Tummy time: We started giving him the opportunity to spend time on his belly as early as two weeks. It was usually in front of the mirror, and we would turn him over as soon as he fussed or seemed tired. At one month old, he was able to lift and hold up his head for a little bit.

Baby wearing: Instead of using a stroller, we wear him in the Moby wrap or the Ergo carrier when we need to be out and about. This allows him to maintain some familiar points of reference when we are out of his comfort zone. It also makes nursing convenient.

Exposure to nature: We regularly spend time outside each day so that he can receive some fresh air, watch the natural mobiles (trees, birds, clouds), and listen to the wonderful music of nature. This also helps him adjust to day and night and his circadian rhythm.

We don't use a pacifier.

Bell rattle: I introduced this rattle around week three. It is usually offered around two to three months, when the child is reflexively grasping, but he was always opening and closing his hands (involuntarily) and I wanted to see how he would react to it. I also thought he would enjoy the sound of the bells. (We used this until about three months.)

Observation of Month 2

A lot of the needs for the second month are the same as the first month. The difference now is that Solu is more aware and improving his abilities daily. We were traveling a lot in the second month, but these are some ways we continued to use Montessori principles:

Maintaining order and points of reference: We continue to use the topponcino for holding him and the bassinet for sleep when on the go. We use the changing pad/towel from our original setup. We also have a portable mat that we can set up with his black-and-white book or a mobile for some independent time. We have found creative ways to hang his mobile. Once, we tied it to the handle of a heavy chopping board and then put the board at the edge of the counter. (He wasn't reaching yet, so it was safe.)

We introduced other mobiles: His favorite is the butterfly mobile. (I have found this to be the most engaging mobile for infants between six and nine weeks, and it was no different with my son.) He loves this mobile. When I changed it to the Gobbi, he was visibly upset until I brought it back.

Clothing: Now that he is more adapted to our movements around him, we are gradually and carefully transitioning him to onesies. We always tell him when we are going to take off his clothes to prepare him. We have also switched to BumGenius All-In-One diapers, because we no longer have access to a cloth diaper service. We often leave his knees and feet bare but use socks or leg warmers as needed.

Nature: We spend a lot of time outdoors and in nature. We go on hikes and to the beach. He is usually in a carrier—either the Ergo carrier or Moby wrap.

Observations at Month 3

I typed up these observations at fifteen weeks.

I didn't realize fifteen weeks have passed since we started this journey. I just looked up his age for this post. He has grown so much in the last fifteen weeks. Here is a summary of things he is doing now.

Gross-Motor:

Lifts and holds up head and shoulders for up to four minutes. Can repeat several times.

Slithers from one point to another. It is easier for him to move backward or rotate.

When sitting/propped with support, he tilts his head forward as if trying to sit down.

Just yesterday, he started lifting his butt and tummy when attempting to slither.

He seems to be attempting to roll over, but this is purely speculation based on some of his movements.

Fine-Motor/Eye-Hand Coordination:

He can reach for a suspended object semi-efficiently but still misses several times.

He can grasp and hold on to an object for several minutes.

He lets go of items in his grasp, but it is still unclear whether this is intentional.

He can bring objects in his grasp to his mouth.

Today I observed him holding a rattle in one hand and using the other hand to touch it.

He usually bats, reaches, and grasps with his left hand.

Language:

Solu makes a lot of sounds!

He keeps quiet and watches the mouth of the speaker when being spoken to and then he responds.

Recently, he has been screaming, yelling, screeching, and making other loud sounds.

About two weeks ago, he spent a lot of time blowing spit bubbles and playing with his lips.

He likes being sung to and has favorite songs. His current favorite song is "Solu ebezina na mummy no nso."

He makes a sound to tell you he wants you to repeat an action.

The other day, we were driving and then stopped to buy gas. He was breastfeeding at the time. When it became hot, he broke the latch and babbled. We all had a good laugh because it really seemed like he was saying, "Why did you turn off the car? I am hot!"

Toileting:

Solu poops once a day, usually in the morning. I have recently introduced the potty since he is quite regular. We have used it for six days (two sets of three consecutive days) and each time, he farted as soon as he sat and then pooped after a few minutes. He pees when he is done pooping.

I have not tracked his pees or noticed any pattern. He pees when taking a bath, and I try to change his diaper every two or three hours and it is usually soaked.

He is cloth-diapered.

Interaction with materials:

His favorite toy right now is the puzzle ball. He will watch it for long periods and also hold it and bring it to his mouth.

He also enjoys looking at the mirror but only for short periods of time.

I plan to try a stylized wood mobile before the end of the week. I will report on how it goes.

He interacts with his books, and it is very easy to tell which pages or images are his favorites.

He makes a sound to tell you he wants you to repeat an action.

Feeding:

Solu is breastfed on demand and will usually root or suck his index finger when hungry. He will fuss if he is not responded to after a while.

He eats best when he is almost asleep or when he has just woken up. At other times, he gets distracted and takes a lot of breaks.

He has to be burped or burps himself several times while eating. He also farts a lot and seems to have a lot of gas.

He seems to react to powdered milk (ingested by me) and has even more gas.

When I have a lot of carbs and no veggies, he struggles with pooping.

We recently started touching some food on his lip or tongue to give him a taste. So far we have done grapes, raw plantains, apple. We just bring it close to his mouth or rub on his lip. He is tentative and then he licks or reaches for it.

Sleep:

Solu sleeps in three- to four-hour stretches.

He currently sleeps in our bed and nurses to sleep.

We are currently trying to transition him to his floor bed for naps. He wakes up after forty minutes, which he also does in our bed, but instead of going back to bed, he starts looking around and trying to slither.

He fights sleep A LOT! Especially when he is very tired.

He is better off when you catch him on the first yawn or eye rub; otherwise he tries sucking, licking your hand or his own, scratching the bed, not blinking, looking around, raising his hand, gripping your finger, and many more things to stay awake.

His current schedule seems to be: Wake up around 6 to 7 a.m., nurse, morning bath, walk/play, feed, nap between 9 and 11 a.m., feed, play, nap around 1 to 3 p.m., feed, play, very short nap around 4:30 p.m., bath time around 6 to 7 p.m., and sleep around 7 to 8 p.m.

Random:

The other night Solu woke up to nurse, and I had to use the bathroom, so his dad held him and was talking to him. When I walked back into the room, I did not make a sound, but he saw me from the corner and was really startled. It was like he did not expect someone to be there. It was quite funny and strange at the same time. We are used to him being startled by certain sounds, but this was different.

Recently I noticed that as soon as he gets hot and starts sweating, he turns, stretches, or bends—whatever he needs to do—to look/stare at the air conditioner. Has he made the connection?

Social/Emotional:

Solu is a very happy boy. He smiles a lot and interacts with people. He recognizes faces, especially those of his parents. When he wakes up, he takes a little time to warm up. He has a serious face that he gets when he is put in his car seat or stroller.

Health:

Solu is growing taller and bigger daily. Everyone who sees him comments on how healthy, big, and strong he is for his age. He has some rashes on his chest and back, but they seem to be clearing.

He has taken the BCG (TB vaccine), Penta 1, and Penta 2 vaccines. The Penta 2 left a small dent in his left thigh.

This is a summary of my little guy at fifteen weeks. I am so thankful and blessed to be taking this journey with him!