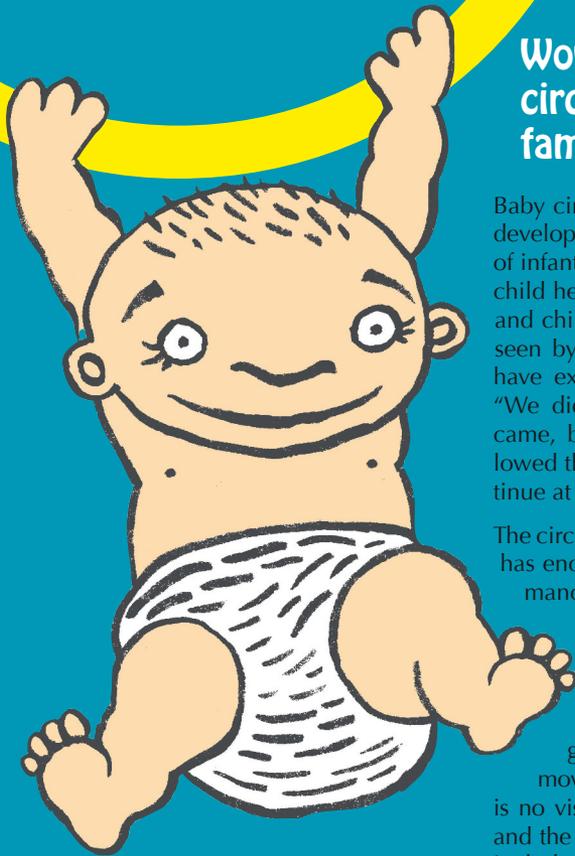


# Wow Hoop



## Wow Hoop (Vau Vanne), circus performance for infant families

Baby circus director Mette Ylikorva based the development of the performance on the needs of infant families. The performance has toured child health centres, cultural centres, festivals and children's events since 2008. It has been seen by 1105 infants and adults. Audiences have expressed both gratitude and surprise: "We didn't know what to expect when we came, but thankfully we did. Our baby followed the performance and now we can continue at home with our own circus."

The circus has awoken curiosity and joy, which has encouraged families to attend the performance with their infants. The show begins gradually and softly. Babies who are meeting other babies for the first time can also participate.

As the audience arrives, performer gets acquainted with each infant before moving to the performance space. There is no visible differentiation between the stage and the audience; the infants' parents are also included. Infants are gently allowed to become familiar with the stage props, which are both safe and bite-resistant. The now familiar performer introduces circus characters and acts, which captivate the attention of the infants and entertain parents.

The performance provides families with infants an easy way to introduce the liveliness and joy of circus to everyday life. The performance ends as gently as it begins. Afterwards, the participants can freely explore the stage area and circus props. This serves as a good



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transition to the workshop. During the workshop session, participants learn scarf tricks and pair acrobatics. This encourages self-assurance in handling infants, brings fun to home life and is good for the children's overall development. The stage props have helped many families to realize their own ideas for their children's rooms. The performance lasts for 30 minutes and the workshop lasts 15-30 minutes. Performances can include up to 14 infants per session.



### **Baby Circus as leisure and aid to infant development**

During baby circus lessons, parents gain confidence in handling their children. After partner acrobatics exercises, even the newest parents no longer feel nervous about lifting their infant or changing diapers. As an instructor I have often been told by parents that, acrobatics involving their infants going upside down, improves the depth and length of naps. Partner acrobatics is fun for the family and many parents enjoy showing their new tricks to friends and family. Circus practice is communal, peer support among infant families arises as a natural consequence. Though partner acrobatics forms the focus, I also provide instruction for developing balance and for juggling techniques adapted for infant families.

### **Pioneer of Baby Circus, Mette Ylikorva**

I was trained as a circus instructor in Finland, at the Turku University of Applied Arts, and completed studies as a circus trainer for people with special needs. I have worked as a circus trainer and performer since 1999. I initially became familiar with infant culture through infant word-play groups, for whom I created movement material. In 2006 I became a parent, which naturally led to baby circus. I was greatly helped during the early phases by learning about Finnish psychologist Kirsti Määttä's Dialogical baby dance, which is

used to stimulate interaction between infants and parents. Through my research I noticed that there is very little material about baby circus. Individual circus trainers have practiced partner acrobatics with their infants and/or held baby groups. I collected all the material I could and started developing various circus forms adapted for infants, with my own child. I continued this work with infant groups and began cooperating with child health centres.

