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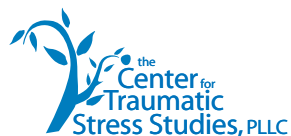


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Infant Massage

A Way of Bonding with Your Baby

BY GRANETTA COLEMAN

Like many new parents, I wanted to promote bonding with my baby right away by having her in my hospital room after birth and by breastfeeding. Due to circumstances at my delivery, my daughter was unable to room with me, and I was unable to breastfeed her for several days. So from the start, my “baby bonding” plan was off course.

Luckily, bonding with your baby does not occur as the result of a single event, and it does not require rooming together or breastfeeding at the outset, although those activities enhance relationship building. Bonding is an ongoing process that occurs when warmth and love are shared and when there are consistent, predictable and interactive experiences between a parent or caregiver and an infant.

Bonding with your baby is important because it leads to your baby becoming emotionally attached to you. A baby’s first attachment relationship is the most significant model for all future relationships in the child’s life. Parents or caregivers massaging their babies can enhance bonding and attachment.

As a massage therapist, I knew that massage would be part of how I cared for my daughter. It is fun getting to know one another through massage, and over time I noticed positive results. I decided that in

addition to massaging my child, I wanted to teach others how to massage their children. Thus, I became a certified educator of infant massage through the International Association of Infant Massage (IAIM).

Infant massage classes as designed by IAIM include explaining the theory surrounding aspects of infant massage, teaching hands-on techniques and discussing topics relevant to caring for your baby. In order to teach the massage techniques, the instructor demonstrates them on a doll, and caregivers follow along performing them on their babies. The techniques are based on Indian and Swedish massage, reflexology and yoga.

Infant massage can be performed on full-term, premature and special-needs babies. A class setting is typically appropriate for babies from 4 weeks to pre-crawling, and crawlers are usually taught in private sessions. Over the course of multiple sessions, a full body massage is taught including strokes on the legs and feet, stomach, chest, arms and hands, face and back. Gentle assisted movements of the arms and legs are also taught. In addition, instruction includes tips on talking to your baby during massage so that language development is stimulated.

Infant massage classes are “baby driven” so that parents and caregivers can listen to their baby’s cues and respond accordingly during massage and at other times. This will improve communication with their child and will likely result in a child that cries less often.

Since infant massage includes many elements that increase bonding, birth and adoptive parents can use infant massage to deepen their connection with their baby. Caregivers, such as grandparents or nannies, can also provide infant massage. If the newborn is not the first child in the family, parents can even teach siblings some infant massage to begin connecting with the baby in a positive way.

New fathers often struggle to find a nurturing role with their newborn, particularly when the baby is breastfeeding. Infant massage can be a great way



for dads to bond with, nurture and learn about their babies. Research shows that fathers who massage their babies have more positive interactions with their babies. These positive interactions are, for example, being more expressive and showing more enjoyment, warmth and acceptance during their interactions with their infants.

In addition to strengthening the connection between baby and caregiver, infant massage has many other benefits for the baby. Research shows that babies who are massaged may sleep deeper and longer, spend more time active and alert for learning, have a more favorable rest-activity cycle by age 8 weeks, and produce more of a sleep regulating hormone by age 12 weeks. Massage may also help relieve the discomfort of gas, colic and constipation. Infant massage also benefits parents by building their confidence as parents, assisting them in learning and responding to their babies cues, and easing stress by allowing parents quality time to relax and unwind with their baby.

Although my relationship with my daughter at the outset did not begin ideally from a bonding standpoint, infant massage helped me connect more deeply with her and feel comfortable handling her. Now, when I rub my hands together and say, "It's time for your massage," I smile and she smiles back. We both relax during this special time together.

Private and group infant massage classes are available in the Capitol Hill area both at Capitol Hill Yoga (www.CapitolHillYoga.com) and at the Healthy Motions® Massage Therapy studio (www.HealthyMotions.com).

Granetta Coleman is a Massage Therapist licensed in DC and a LAIM Certified Educator of Infant Massage. She can be reached at contact@healthymotions.com or 202-276-0517. ★



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