

It Feels Good!

A Lesson on Infant Massage

Playgroup #3

Materials Needed

- Unscented massage lotion or oil
- Blankets or towels

Handouts

- Nurturing Touch: Instructions in the Art of Infant Massage
- Review of the Strokes

Introduction

Massage Therapy with Normal Infants

Forty full-term, one to three month-old infants born to adolescent mothers were given 15 minutes of either massage or rocking for 12 days over a six week period. According to the research, the infants that received message:

- Spent more time in active-alert and active-awake states
- Cried less
- Had lower salivary cortisol levels during the massage, suggesting lower stress levels
- Spent less time in an active-awake state after the massage session (suggesting massage may be more effective than rocking for inducing sleep)
- Long term effects over six week period included: (1) gained weight, (2) improved on emotionality, sociability, and soothability temperament, (3) decreased urinary stress hormones, (4) increased serotonin levels, suggesting less depression

Now to demonstrate the effectiveness of touch we want the parents to partner with another parent for this exercise. First, exchange names and one fact about your self. Now discuss how you feel towards each other after this brief exchange. Second, exchange a more personal bit of information. Now discuss how you feel towards each other after this exchange. Third, each partner will massage the other partners hand for one minute. Actually time this exercise. Then discuss how you feel after this exchange. This illustrates the power of touch.

Lesson Plan

Lesson Objectives

- Understand the benefits of massage for babies, children, and adults
- Learn when is an appropriate time to use infant massage
- Learn relaxation techniques for parents
- Practice the basic strokes of infant massage

Massage benefits for babies and children

- Relief – massage can relieve discomfort from teething, congestion, gas and colic, and emotional stress
- Bonding – more intimate interaction with parent and baby/child helping to foster the parent/infant bond
- Skin stimulation – all physiological systems are stimulated by massage. It speeds myelination of the brain/nervous system
- Helps to increase oxygen and nutrient flow to cells
- Helps to deepen respiration
- Helps to improve muscle tone
- Helps to encourage midline orientation
- Helps to improve sensory awareness
- Helps baby/child to sleep deeper and longer
- Improves digestion
- Enhances neurological development
- Provides a special communication time that serves as a safe time for children to confide in their parents

Massage Benefits for Parents

- Helps the parent to feel more competent and confident in their parent role
- Helpful to ease stress of a working parent who must be separated from the child during the day
- Increases parents' ability to help relax child in times of stress
- Increases self-esteem of parents by enhancing and reinforcing their parenting skills and validating their parent role
- Baby's daily massage time offers parent a time to relax and unwind from the busy pace of life
- It enhances communication and builds respect
- Provides intimacy and special time for father and child
- It's fun and relaxing for parents to massage their children

Suggestions for Infant Massage

Create a special time for you and your baby each day. Be flexible. Some days you may have more time than others. Perhaps you have a quiet half hour when baby awakens from his nap. Maybe you have a few minutes while changing his diaper or just before his bath.

Be sensitive to your baby's moods and try to choose a time when he is not too tired or hungry. He will not be able to relax and respond to you if his needs are unmet.

Observe your baby and watch for a time when she is alert, quiet, and receptive. This is the best time to start the massage interaction.

Create a space that is comfortable, warm, and free from distractions. Warmth is especially important for newborns because they tend to lose body heat rapidly. Find a sunny spot on your bed, use a space heater to warm the room, or you may do the massage with baby partially clothed.

You may want to have a soft blanket to place over your baby during the massage. A soft pillow to place baby on provides a feeling of security and warmth for young infants.

Be relaxed. Make sure you are comfortable. Sit in a way that is restful; try sitting cross-legged on a couch or bed with baby in front of you or lean back against the wall with baby lying on your extended legs.

Be aware of your needs and create a time for massage when you feel relaxed enough to put your concerns and distractions aside for a while. Many mothers and fathers find themselves relaxing and letting go of tension along with their babies during a massage.

Relaxation Exercise for Parents

To help yourself relax, take a slow, deep breath. Continue breathing slowly and deeply as you let go of tension throughout your body. Since many of us hold tension in our shoulders and neck, it may help to slowly rotate your neck from side to side. Gently lift and roll your shoulders. Breathe deeply throughout the massage to increase your enjoyment and help your baby learn how to relax.

Activity

Have all the parent's prepare to massage their babies. Hand out the guide "Nurturing Touch: Instruction in the Art of Infant Massage" and the Review Strokes Card. Follow the guide. Try to keep conversation between parents to a minimum.

Suggested Reading

Infant Massage--Revised Edition: A Handbook for Loving Parents

By Vimala Schneider McClure

Loving Hands: The Traditional Art of Baby Massage

By Frederick Leboyer

References