

## Teaching Infant Massage: Case Study

Veronica Renyard

I have recently completed my baby massage training with *Touch-Learn* Ltd. As part of this training I had to complete a three session one to one programme.

I was given the opportunity to do this with a mum (M) I had worked with four years ago, when her circumstances had been very different. At that time M was drinking heavily and taking drugs. All her children were in the care of the local authority and she was living with her mother. M had suffered severe postnatal depression after the birth of her second child, which resulted in hospitalisation. A fear of this returning had impacted on the births of her subsequent children. M had experienced a difficult childhood herself. My role at this time was in relation to M's action plan to enable her to get her children back living with her and to help her develop healthy parenting skills.

It was extremely positive for me to meet M again and see how far she has come since those days. She is now settled in her own home and has all her children living with her, but admits to still having some difficult times.

My first session involved just M, myself and her new baby, as all the other children were with friends, as it was the school holidays. M was keen to do baby massage, as she wanted to make sure she bonded well with her new baby. She was very taken with the concept of asking for a baby's permission. She admitted to this being something that she had never considered before, but would in the future; as why should a baby be treated any differently to an older child or adult. Our session went very well and M was very positive around the value of baby massage and the bonding process. At this session M expressed her concerns with regard to her developing postnatal depression and admitted that she had the signs and symptoms and had been very weepy and not able to cope. With some support she was able to challenge the GP and get this recognised.

At my second session all M's other children greeted me at the door. M had been explaining the virtues of baby massage and showing them what she had learnt the previous week. M felt that it would be a very useful tool for them all to learn as they could use it on each other to build on their bonding and attachment, as they had some challenges around this since getting back together as a family. Thank goodness for spare dolls and a teddy bear!! My one to one had become a group. The children's request was to have an arm massage at the end of the session so, patch testing completed, the week's massage strokes began. All were captivated from the start and followed the demonstration keenly. As promised, at the end, I taught a hand and arm massage so that they could do it on each other and on Mum. I left with a promise to return next week with a copy of the handouts for each of them.

Session three started with feedback from all the children on how they had got on before they went out with a relative. I was pleased to have the last session with M and baby on her own. Session strokes completed and one baby fast

asleep, M and I had a coffee. This gave her the opportunity to share with me how the last week had gone. M was quite overwhelmed with the impact that massage had on her children but especially with her second youngest daughter (J) and her relationship with her. J had been very aggressive towards her Mum since they had been a family again, but the past week had proved so positive, with J giving arm massages to Mum and vice versa, that the anger and resentment had been replaced with positive communication and a calmness between them. M also found it a calming influence for her; and, as the baby thoroughly enjoyed massage, it enabled a positive for M in coping with her postnatal depression.

The whole experience has left me sold on the value of baby massage not only for 'normal' families but also for those such as M's who have in their lives experienced so much and how it can build and support the bonding, attachment and relationships within families. I felt privileged to have been able to pass on another very useful skill to a mother to enable her to better support her family.

Thank you M and family.