

# PIRI

PARENT-INFANT  
RESEARCH  
INSTITUTE &  
INFANT CLINIC



## Intuitive Mothering Program: Dance Therapy at the Infant Clinic

by Dance Therapist  
Elizabeth Loughlin.

From birth, mothers and infants relate physically to each other in what Winnicott (1967) called the "psychosomatic partnership". Dance therapy, with movement to music and gentle percussion is an expressive arts therapy with a physical focus

that recognizes and attends to this partnership.

The movement and dance medium also encourages mother-infant reciprocal responsiveness where poor health, traumatic birth, PND, anxiety and other risk factors has depleted the mother or the infant's capacities for mutual communication.

In the beginning of the dance therapy session, imaginative objects allow new ways to play, or to try out peek-a-boo games together. When comfortable, the mothers hold their infants and move through the room in suggested pathways. As the

sessions continue, the mothers gain confidence and energy through the supportive circle or line dances and accompanying simple classical or world music. Each infant feels their mother's moving body as she straightens and bends, travels and stops. Both mothers and infants gain practice at becoming physically connected and enlivened together (Loughlin, 1999).

This 8-week semi-structured dance program is called Intuitive Mothering as it builds on what mothers do naturally with their infants and also on each mother's wish to enjoy being with her baby.

PIRI Newsletter

July-Sept 2008



The Parent Infant Research Institute (PIRI) is a vigorous and innovative Australian research institute focussing on understanding, developing and applying treatments to improve parent and infant well being. PIRI believes that early intervention is the key to better outcomes for families.

While PIRI has a strong research focus, it also comprises a clinical unit (Infant Clinic). The Infant Clinic is a Centre of Excellence and provides a clinical service to assist with the difficulties experienced by parents and infants in the first years of life.

The infants make an active contribution to the mother-infant movement dialogue. As the weeks go by, infants delighted by the new “toys” and movement games “catch” the attention of their mothers who find they are looking at their baby in a new way. One mother said, “I wish I had done this with my older child; I was so busy feeding her and getting her to sleep that there was no time. Now I’m really noticing my second daughter and seeing so much of what she can do”. Another mother said, “I did not know my boy could be sensitive and careful. I can really slow down”.



The babies themselves often develop a mini group of their own – on the floor or in the circle in their mothers’ arms, exchanging their own gestures and other communications.

As the new holding, carrying and communication patterns evolve, the women begin to sense their body expression and notice the increased exchanges with their infant. In the last few sessions, there is space for mothers to link the meaning of these expressions to their current life or earlier difficulties. Feedback from a stand alone video reinforces the mothers’ awareness and insights.



The Intuitive Mothering group is offered through the Infant Clinic. Participants join the group after completing other Infant Clinic groups or individual therapy. Mothers and infants may also be referred by a parent-infant residential unit, GP, MCHN, community based centre program or DHS child protection worker. Individual dance therapy is also offered as a treatment option.

For referrals to the dance program, contact the intake worker at the Infant Clinic. Information on the dance therapy program, or short courses for health professionals, Introduction to Creative Dance and Selecting Music for Infants and Young Children, contact Elizabeth Loughlin, dance therapist, Infant Clinic on 03 9496 4496.

### References

D.W. Winnicott, (1967) The concept of a healthy individual, in Home is where we start from. Essays by a psychoanalyst. Penguin 1986, 1990, pp 21-38.

E. Loughlin, (1999) The Shared Dance, in Dance Therapy Collections No 2 Dance Therapy Association of Australia pp 37-42.

Photos of Mother-baby dance from Lieto Creative Dance studio. Photographer, Natalie Poole.



## Latest Research Publications

### Single motherhood versus poor partner relationship: outcomes for antenatal mental health

This study was funded as part of the beyondblue National Postnatal Depression Program 2001-2005.

#### Background

In the transition to parenthood, lack of social support significantly impacts on maternal mood. This paper compared the influence of single-mother status and level of partner support in a partnered relationship, on antenatal emotional health.

#### Method

Antenatal demographic, psychosocial and mental health data (EPDS score) were collected from 1578 Australian women. The association between these variables and marital status was investigated using logistic regression.

#### Results

Sixty-two women (3.9%) were identified as single/unpartnered. Elevated EPDS scores (>12) were found in 15.2% of the total cohort and 25.8% of the single/unpartnered women. EPDS scores were significantly lower for single/unpartnered women than for women with unsupportive partners. Compared to the partnered cohort, single/unpartnered women were more likely to have experienced at least 2 weeks of depression before the current pregnancy, a previous psychopathology, emotional problems during the current pregnancy and major life events in the last year.

#### Conclusions

Women in a partnered relationship with poor partner-derived support were at an increased risk of elevated antenatal EPDS scores compared to single/unpartnered women. A previous history of depression and current emotional problems, rather than single mother status, were significant risk factors for elevated EPDS scores. Due to the known impact of poor antenatal mental health on postnatal parenting efficacy and infant attachment, identification of psychosocial and socioeconomic risk factors, including the quality of partner support, is strongly advocated.

#### Reference

Bilszta, J., Tang, M., Meyer, D., Milgrom, J., Ericksen, J. & Buist, A. (2008). Single motherhood versus poor partner relationship: outcomes for antenatal mental health. **Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry**, 42, 56-65.

### Psychologist from The Netherlands Visits PIRI

PIRI received a visit from Dr Karin van Doesum, a psychologist from The Netherlands who works clinically and in research with mothers and infants. The focus of her work is on early preventive intervention for depressed mothers and their infants. The intervention involves home visits where everyday activities such as feeding and bathing are monitored and video-taped. At a follow-up visit, the therapist provides comments and observations to the mother as they play-back the video. The aims of the intervention are to improve the quality of mother-infant interaction, foster secure attachment and enhance infant socio-emotional functioning.

This intervention has been studied in a randomised controlled trial (RCT) and was found to have positive effects on the quality of mother-infant interaction in terms of maternal sensitivity and infant responsiveness and involvement. Infants in the experimental group had higher scores for attachment security and for one aspect of socio-emotional functioning (competence). The intervention proved successful in preventing deterioration of the quality of mother-infant interaction, which is an important risk factor for psychopathology in adolescents and adults.

#### Reference

Van Doesum, K. T. M., Riksen-Walraven, J. M., Hosman, C. M. H., & Hoefnagels, C. (2008). A Randomized Controlled Trial of a Home-Visiting Intervention Aimed at Preventing Relationship Problems in Depressed Mothers and their Infants. **Child Development**, 79(3), 547-561.

# News...News...News...

## AIMH Conference



### Registration of Interest

2008 conference

Australian Association for Infant  
Mental Health and  
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander  
Perinatal and Infant Mental Health

5 - 8 November 2008

Adelaide Hilton Hotel

#### Angels in the Nursery

Supporting Parent-Child Relationships  
Supporting benevolent parental influences

#### Keynote Speakers

Dr Julie Larrieu, USA & Dr Anthony Bateman, UK

#### Themes

- Parent Infant Therapy
- Mentalisation
- Supporting Families/Communities/Carers/Cultures
- Healing/Reparation *Ghost busting in the Nursery*

register your interest at

[www.sapmea.asn.au/aaimh08](http://www.sapmea.asn.au/aaimh08)

Email for queries [aaimh08@sapmea.asn.au](mailto:aaimh08@sapmea.asn.au)

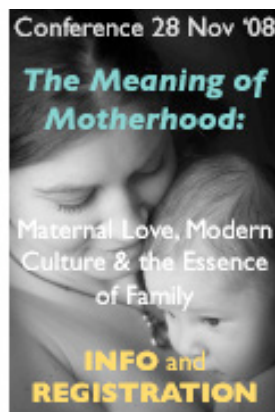


## International Conference

### 'The Meaning of Motherhood: Maternal Love, Modern Culture and the Essence of Family.'

This conference is proudly presented by the Centre for Attachment, the Families Commission, Parents Centres of New Zealand, Great Potentials and the Parenting Council and will be held in Auckland, New Zealand. Speakers include Anne Manne, Naomi Stadlen and Elisabeth Muir. For more information and to register, go to:

[www.centreforattachment.com](http://www.centreforattachment.com)



## QEC Conference

QEC's 5<sup>th</sup> Biennial International Conference, **'Reaching Out to Vulnerable Families: Achieving Better Outcomes for Children'** will be held at The Sebel Albert Park on 20 & 21 November 2008 (19 November - Pre Conference Workshops). For more info, go to: [www.qec.org.au](http://www.qec.org.au)

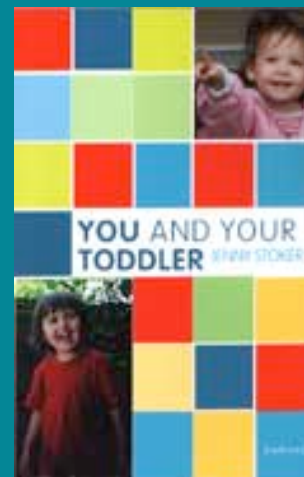
## Tweddle @ Home

Tweddle now operates a fee based in-home early parenting service, Tweddle @ Home. The service offers families convenient, quick access to expert one-to-one support and advice, tailored to individual needs. For more info, go to: [www.tweddle.org.au](http://www.tweddle.org.au)

## BOOK REVIEW

### You and Your Toddler

by Jenny Stoker



A central theme of this book is the gradual process of separation between parents and toddlers and the growth of autonomy in them all. Jenny Stoker has written with clarity, sympathy and warmth about the multiple problems children face in their toddler years and she has addressed the parents with immense empathy. Stoker manages to convey complex concepts and arguments in a lucid and simple style that all readers will find most helpful. Part of the 'You and Your Child' Series published by Karnac.

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