Intuitive Mothering Program: Dance Therapy at the Infant Clinic

by Dance Therapist
Elizabeth Loughlin.

From birth, mothers and infants relate physically to each other through mothers' handling and holding capacity (Winnicott, 1960). Dance therapy, with movement to music and gentle percussion is an expressive arts therapy with a physical focus that recognizes and attends to this dyadic 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.
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
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
AAIMH 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/Careers/Cultures
- Healing/Reparation (ghost busting in the Nursery)

register your interest at
www.sapmea.asn.au/aimh08
Email for queries 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

QEC Conference

QEC’s 5th 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

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

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.

Parent-Infant Research Institute,
Austin Health

TEL: 9496 4496 FAX: 9496 4148
www.piri.org.au

Prof Jeannette Milgrom
Director, Psychologist

Ms Jennie Ericksen
Co-ordinator, Psychologist

Dr Dr Bronwyn Leigh
Psychologist

Dr Megan Andrew
Psychologist

Dr Carol Newnham
Psychologist

Dr Charlene Schembri
Psychologist

Ms Hetti Dubow
Psychologist

Ms Elizabeth Loughlin
Dance Therapist

Dr Nisha Brown
Developmental Specialist

Ms Carmel Ferretti
Psychologist

Dr Alan Gemmill
Senior Research Officer

Mr Chris Holt
Senior Research Assistant

Ms Lisa Bolger
Mental Health Nurse

Dr Sarah Phillips
Psychologist