

When Fathers Massaged their Babies

INFANT MESSAGE IS ONE OF THREE EVIDENCE BASED CAREGIVING ACTIVITIES SUPPORTING BONDING AND ATTACHMENT

When fathers were asked why they wanted to learn to massage their babies, each one replied,
“Because I don’t have a breast!”

Fathering Attachment Behaviors

Awareness and Sensitivity

Fathers adjusted the time of day, the pressure of the massage, the part of the body massaged according to the needs of the baby as expressed by their body language and vocalizations.

Emotional Expression and Relationship

Fathers expressed verbally and non-verbally when engaging with their babies and they interpreted their babies’ emotional expression. They described their pride and satisfaction in their relationship with their baby.

Engagement Cues

Fathers and babies exhibited intense eye contact, responded to touch and verbalizations during massage.

Motivation

Fathers desire and value access and opportunities to spend time and interact with their babies and to support the baby’s mother.

Other Fathering Research

Fathers who participate in caring for their babies have an increase in oxytocin (bonding hormone) and model behaviors similar to the mothers.

Other Infant Massage Research

Mothers reported less depression symptoms after watching their babies being massaged by others.

Babies who were massaged left the hospital 3 weeks earlier than babies who were not massaged, gained weight, and slept longer.

Reference list provided by request. MaryKay.Keller@Wilmu.edu



Benefits reported by fathers

Fathers who massaged their babies expressed feelings of *competence* and *confidence* in soothing their babies.

Fathers enjoyed being able to *comfort* and *soothe* their babies.

Fathers *value* Infant Massage as a caregiving activity that benefits both them and their babies and listed many benefits.

Father Quotes

I feel confident in how I react to my baby because I now know what my baby likes, what he needs and it is important it is to stay where my infant can see me because it calms him.

It has been beneficial to me because I feel closer in a way and sometimes I do feel left out because, being a father, I feel like there is automatically more responsibility put on the mom because she has to breastfeed, and a lot of times during the night when she gets up I can help burp and stuff but, you know, I can’t feed him. I just feel kind of now I have something I can do to contribute more so.

I noticed that when I was asking her permission to massage her that she, I don’t know if it was just my imagination, it just seemed like she kind of gave me her foot. I was like, ‘can I have your foot?’ and she kind of just dropped it. Instead of her being up here she kind of just kicked it forward, I guess just didn’t do anything with it. Yeah, I think that it works and it helps you get more respect for like the baby,”