What do Newborns Teach Us About Family Engagement?

Working With Families in the Newborn Period

Michigan Home Visiting Conference
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Opportunities?
1. Understand the competencies that newborn’s bring into the world
2. Understand the opportunity for parent-child attachment based on the newborns behaviors
3. Understand the professional’s role in supporting attachment
The Competent Newborn
Sensory Competencies

- Visual
- Auditory
- Tactile
Motor Competencies

- Muscle Tone and Strength
- Reflexes
  - Grasp, root, step
- Fully-Formed Behaviors
  - Hand-to-mouth activity
  - Pull-to-sit
  - Crawling and turning head in prone
States of consciousness

- State 1: deep sleep
- State 2: light sleep
- State 3: drowsiness
- State 4: alert
- State 5: fussing
- State 6: crying
State Regulation

- Habituation
- Self-Soothing
- Stress Cues
Self Regulation

Hand to mouth skill allows baby to soothe self
Mutual Regulation
Newborn Behavior is Meaningful

We “read” newborn behavior from many perspectives:

Developmental
Biological
Cultural
Personal
• Video
The social newborn: The infant as catalyst

• “It is fortunate for their survival that babies are so designed by nature that they beguile and enslave mothers.”

  John Bowlby

• “The baby stands for the renewal of the self. The birth can be experienced as a psychological re-birth for the parents.”

  Selma Fraiberg
A sensitive stage in the development of parent-infant communication.

Infant and parent are in a heightened state of readiness to exchange their first communication signals in their efforts to reach “affect attunement” in their interactions.
Early parent–child interaction includes:

• Engagement
• Attunement
• Imitation
Readiness for Relationships

• A period of disorganization
• Current relationships disorganize and must reorganize
• The newborn elicits emotional strength and weakness: “Ghosts in the Nursery” (Fraiberg) and “Angels in the nursery” (Leiberman)
• Post-partum mother’s mind is “a sponge regarding the infant” (Keefer); new parents are psychologically open to form new relationships; mothers show “primary maternal preoccupation” (Winnicott)
The Capable Parent

- Already an expert
- Months of mental preparation
- Knows a great deal about baby
- Rapid learning in the first days
- Bringing all resources to bear
- Writing a new chapter about this child
Our relationship with the family begins.

- In a very few moments, we need to
- Convey that we SEE THEM
- Convey RESPECT
- Convey CARING
- Bring KNOWLEDGE and RESOURCES
- Begin with OPENNESS, not agenda
Nurturing the parent

Parents are exceptionally vulnerable during the newborn period, wondering

“How is my baby?”

and

“How am I doing?”
A Relationship-based Approach

- The newborn period is a critical transition period for both infant and family and for the parent-infant relationship
- Development and change occur only in the context of a relationship
- Support for parents during this period can enhance the social, cognitive and emotional development of the infant
- Newborn parents are psychologically ready for a new relationship with their
  - Newborn baby
  - Partner
  - Family
  - Clinician
  - Community
A Successful Practitioner uses Reflective Listening (Phyllis Klaus; Constance Keefer)

- Assumes a position of unconditional positive regard
- Encourages communication
- Validates - does not advise
- Helps clarify
- Mutual Action - partnership
Helpful Hints

- Take time to simply look at the baby with parents.
- Identify the newborn’s state.
- Take the baby and parent where you find them.
- *Show*. Don’t tell.
- Use more listening than talking.
- *PAUSE*. Use silence.
- Focus on the family.
- Recognize that every encounter is an opportunity to learn.
- Save paperwork for the end of your newborn encounter.
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