

Hands on in Geraldton

Infant massage is popular in many cultures and research indicates many benefits for infant and parent,¹ including parent empowerment, increased physical contact and improved attachment.

There is also emerging evidence that infant massage workshops are effective in treating postnatal depression and anxiety. Specifically, mothers who attend an infant massage workshop appear to recover more rapidly, even when controlling for the social interaction aspect of the workshops.²

In January, the Women's Health Resource Centre in Geraldton obtained a grant from the Department for Communities for a one-off project to support families in nurturing and caring for their children. The grant provided two infant massage workshops on 16 and 17 February.

The morning and afternoon workshops were free and a healthy lunch, parent handouts and baby massage oil were provided to participants. The workshops were facilitated by Natalie Garmson, a Certified Infant Massage Instructor and Western Australian State Representative with the International Association of Infant Massage (IAIM).

The IAIM promotes positive touch and secure attachment between babies and caregivers in over 35 countries. The IAIM trains and certifies instructors to deliver a unique infant massage program focusing on parents' awareness of, and confidence in responding to, their baby's individual needs, cues and signals using nurturing touch and other forms of communication.

Six women and their babies attended, with many of the women having experienced perinatal anxiety and depression. The workshops provided a social and bonding experience for mums and babies, teaching mums how to 'read' and respond to their babies cues, and how to incorporate relaxation methods in their daily lives.

Feedback from the participants was very positive, with all women saying they enjoyed the workshops. Relaxation, confidence with and enjoyment of touch, and learning massage strokes were recurring themes. Many women also reported how much they enjoyed mixing socially with other mums.

Since the workshops, one participant contacted Women's Health to report that since practicing infant massage on her baby, he is no longer suffering from constipation. This had been a great source of anxiety and stress for her, and she emphasised how beneficial she found the workshops.

Reflecting on the workshops, Natalie says, "I enjoyed facilitating the infant massage workshops with the mums, especially since I suffered from postnatal depression some six years ago myself. I wish I knew back then the benefits (for both mother and baby) of infant massage. Parents learn so much more than how to massage their baby – understanding baby's body language and behavioural states also form an important part of the workshops. It is a real confidence booster for the mums".

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- 2 Onozawa, K. et al (2001). Infant massage improves mother-infant interaction for mothers with postnatal depression, *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 63(1), pp. 201-207

