

INFANT MASSAGE

Communicate Your Love Through Your Touch

Benefits

For parents:

- Helps parents feel more competent and confident in their parent role.
- Helpful to ease stress of a working parent who must be separated from the child during the day.
- Increases parents ability to help relax child in times of stress.
- Increases self-esteem of parents by enhancing and reinforcing their parenting skills and validating their parent role.
- Enhances communication and builds respect.
- Provides intimacy and special time for father and child.
- It's fun and relaxing for parents to massage their children.

For Babies and Children:

- Relief—massage can relieve discomfort from teething, congestion, gas and colic, and emotional stress.
- Bonding—more intimate interaction with parent and baby/child helping to foster the parent/infant bond.
- Skin Stimulation—all the physiological systems are stimulated by massage. It speeds myelination of the brain/nervous system.
- Helps to increase oxygen and nutrient flow to cells. Helps to deepen respiration.
- Helps to improve muscle tone and circulation.
- Helps to encourage midline orientation.
- Helps to improve sensory awareness.
- Helps baby/child to sleep deeper and longer.
- Improves digestion.
- Enhances neurological development.
- Provides a special communication time that serves as a safe time for children to confide in their parent.

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MASSAGING OUR CHILDREN

Questions and Answers

How long should I massage my child? Infant massage should last as long as it is effective and pleasurable for both infant and parent. This may be as little as a few minutes (which can be very effective) and as long as a half-hour or more.

What type of oil should I use? We strongly recommend cold-pressed oils which can be purchased most readily in health food stores or the health section of some grocery stores. The oil you use will be absorbed in your child's body through the skin, so we suggest that the oil be a food and not a petroleum product.

What kind of environment is best to massage in? Some suggestions are that the environment of the room be as quiet as possible and peacefully lit. Be sure your child is warm and comfortable with the head supported with a pillow (for children, not infants), and that you are comfortable with your own back supported if necessary (for example against a couch or chair).

What should be my intention in massaging my child? Although massage is very therapeutic in many ways, I suggest you "intend" to just be with your child during this time together (rather than doing something to your child). Listen with your hands and your heart as you massage, dropping your expectations or need of accomplishment. The quality of this type of interaction is very powerful and life-giving....so "intend" to enjoy a special experience with your child emotionally and physically.

How do I read cues when massaging my child? Observe your child's breathing to notice if the touch is being taken in. Your child's breathing will probably become deeper and slower. Sighs may indicate your child is receiving touch in a nurturing way. Facial expressions, body posturing, movement, and sharing what he likes with words or pleasurable sounds also indicates if he likes his experience.

How old can the child be? Birth through the teen years. The principles of respect and asking permission apply throughout all these years. This is a great way to keep in touch with your child, and it's never too late to start! Also, for siblings of children with special needs, this is a good way to neutralize jealousy and provide the focused attention they also require.

Can Dads do this? YES!! Father involvement is necessary and effective, and massage is a wonderful way for fathers to demonstrate their love and support. Respect that the father's way of relating to the child may be different from mother's.

How do I begin the massage?

- After preparing the environment, take a few minutes to relax yourself. Keep it simple and short, and use whatever method works for you. Ideas include: taking a few deep breaths, singing, stretching, saying a prayer, washing your hands and face, etc.
- Ask your child for permission to massage
- Play music if it's soothing for both of you, or sing lullabies
- Remind yourself to stay flexible and respectful with how the massage unfolds