



## *Introduction to Baby Massage*

### *Why massage your baby?*

Touch is of the utmost importance to babies, it allows them to feel safe, and is the first way in which they begin to understand the world -even before they are born. Infant massage is not just touch but a special form of contact, using the sensory experience that baby knows best to connect and communicate.

Positive touch from massage provides a feeling of security and wellbeing to babies and young children, it reminds them of the close contact and rhythmic vibrations they felt while in the womb. This gives them the confidence to explore and experience their surroundings, essential for baby's development, self confidence and awareness of their own body and the space around them.

Additional benefits of baby massage include;

- Strengthening of the bonding process between parent and child, and providing the opportunity for special time together. This can be especially beneficial for those parents who have found the bonding process difficult, for example if baby has had to spend time in the special care unit, or for those suffering with PND.
- Improving parent's ability to understand and respond to baby's cues
- Relief from colic, wind, constipation, teething pain and skin disorders
- Stimulation of the digestive, circulatory, respiratory and immune systems and all baby's senses
- Improved co-ordination and muscle tone
- Promoting deeper, more restful sleep and the regulation of sleep patterns

It is also a lovely, relaxing experience for both parent and child, and can be a great way for dads and siblings to develop their relationship with baby.

A massage routine, such as the one introduced on this course, can help put a structure to the natural way you probably already touch and stroke your baby and can help you to feel more confident in handling your precious bundle. It is best to massage little and often, a few minutes each day, or several times a week is more beneficial than longer sessions once in a while. Your baby will quickly come to

recognise when it is “massage time” and relax into the experience more quickly and readily, bringing greater benefits and enjoyment for you both.

### *Getting Started*

Massage can take place at any time of day, and you may want to build it in to your baby’s routine, for example after bath time, or first thing in the morning, and do a little every day. It should, however, be a pleasurable experience for both you and your little one, not something to be seen as an extra chore to be fitted in to the day, or something that must be done at a particular time, whether or not you and/or baby are in the right mood.

Choosing the best time:

Use your instincts and read the signs your baby is giving you to decide if it is the right time for massage. Do not massage;

- While baby is asleep.
- If baby is hungry – feed first then wait 30 minutes.
- Immediately after feeding, or while nappy changing.
- If baby is unwell. (or restrict massage to areas baby finds most soothing)
- The affected areas if baby has any injuries or has had recent surgery.
- For a couple of days after immunisations.
- If baby is showing signs that they do not want to be massaged. (see baby cues)

Baby Cues:

If your baby is happy to be massaged they may show the following signs or behaviours, known as engagement cues;

- Bright eyes
- Focused expression
- Calm attentiveness
- Relaxed limbs

If your baby is showing any of these behaviours, or disengagement cues, it may be better to wait until another time to massage;

- Avoiding looking at you
- Yawning
- Arching
- Grimacing
- Holding limbs stiffly

All babies are different, and will give different “cues” to show how they feel. You know your baby best and so will be the best judge of whether or not your baby is happy to be massaged at a particular time. If your baby is showing signs that they would not be happy to be massaged just then, simply wait until later and try again. When you begin massage with your baby a few minutes at a time is often enough stimulation for them, especially when very young. Gradually build up the time you spend for each massage session until you are able to complete a full routine.

### *Using Oils*

We suggest using oil during baby massage as a lubricant to avoid friction on the skin while performing the massage strokes. A small amount spread over the hands helps them to glide over the skin and gain the rhythm that babies enjoy and benefit from.

There are different types of oil that can be used, but an unscented, natural vegetable oil is recommended when massaging your baby. Sunflower, olive or coconut oil all work well. If possible choose one that is cold pressed and designed specifically for massage.

Vegetable oils are a good choice because they are easy to use, and absorb readily in to the skin, many having therapeutic properties. They are unlikely to cause allergies and are safe if put in the mouth. By using an unperfumed oil it will not mask the smell of mum (or dad), as this scent is important to young babies and helps the bonding process.

Many commercially produced massage oils and gels use mineral oils, which are petroleum based. These do not absorb into the skin, but sit on its surface acting as a barrier to moisture, and can make for a very slippery baby! Many also contain perfumes. They are therefore not so good to use for baby massage.

### *Getting ready for massage*

Once you have found a time you feel is right for the massage, ensuring that it can be special time for you and your baby when you are not rushed and stressed get the space you will be using ready too;

- Ensure the room you are using is not too cold. Keep lights low and minimise distractions.
- Clear a space, either on the floor or, if baby is not yet mobile, on a double bed.
- Lay out a towel and if possible put on some music that you find soothing or sing to your baby (try the track included in this module). Try to keep to the same colour of towel and the same music each time you massage. These act as a signal to your baby that it is time for massage, and they will come to anticipate what is going to happen, and feel more secure and relaxed.

### *Beginning the massage*

When you are ready get your baby undressed and lay him or her gently on the towel. You may want to just remove clothing from the area you are about to massage if your baby does not like to be fully undressed, or for warmth.

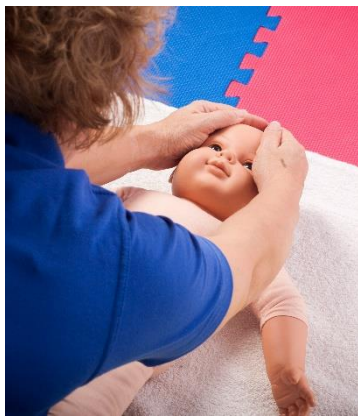
Each time you practise massage, begin the same way:

#### **Massage Time:**

- Rub your hands together above baby and make eye contact. Say “massage time”, letting baby know what is about to happen and asking their permission to continue.

#### **Body Soother Stroke:**

- Place both your hands on baby’s head and stroke slowly all the way down their body to their feet. Repeat once or twice.



Now put a little oil on your hands, rub them together to warm the oil and start the massage. Don't be afraid to use a firm pressure when massaging your baby. Too light a touch can feel tickly to your baby and does not give the same benefits. Experiment with different pressure to see what your baby responds to. He or she will soon let you know if they are not happy! Remember;

- A firm touch relays confidence, strength and security.

As you go through the massage strokes you may find that your baby prefers to lie or be held in different positions, so do try some variations, such as lying on your lap, or being held upright to see what your baby prefers.

The massage routine you will learn on this course is just a starting point and there is are lots of different strokes and techniques that you can use to build on what you learn here. If you would like to expand on and extend your massage practice, and there are many books and practical courses which will give you further information.