

Carrying in clinical practice

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A Letter to DIDYMOS

This letter was written by Dr. Waltraud Stening to Erika Hoffmann

In the last few years, the treatment with early stimulation and the psycho-social care of premature babies has been gaining more and more in importance. Since 1991 the University Clinic in Cologne has been encouraging physical contact between parents and children more directly than before. One of these methods is the kangaroo method where for several hours a day the premature babies are placed naked on the unclothed skin of the parents. The parents are resting in comfortable garden chairs. Apart from stimulating various senses of the children, this close physical contact has many other advantages.

The parents now get to know their children's personality earlier than before. They become more confident in their own strength as well as the ability of the child. Apart from this, these „premature“ parents feel able to take over the care of their children earlier.

In 1991 this physical contact regime led to us encourage the parents to carry their children while walking around in the grounds of the clinic. This practise is now so established, that there are around 10 baby slings to one pram on the ward. There is a sling for almost every bed where the baby is ready to be taken out on a walk. The cradle carry method has proved particularly useful for premature babies. We always place the head of the infant on the lower strip of the sling. This is the ideal position for the baby



and the parents can easily see the baby. As soon as the weather allows it one can now see many parents (often both together!) going for walks with their babies. It teaches the parents to manage the care of their children alone, without the supervision of the nurses and without the control of heart/lung monitors.

The nurses also carry the babies around in baby slings. It has been ideal especially with very restless children. This method of carrying has been used in particular with children of drug dependent mothers. Their children seem to need a great deal of physical contact and exercise. The baby sling enables the nurse in question to carry on working while calming the baby. She tends to do the clearing up at these times. These are only two aspects of the often called „gentle care“ method of looking after premature babies. But it seems to me that physical contact between parents and children is of enormous value for all concerned.

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