

Massage for Children By Terri Henry

I'm sure everyone who attended Kids Day Dominica on Saturday 17th September 2005, would agree that it was a highly successful event. I personally spent almost 4 hours massaging the backs of small children aged 2-8 years and had a huge amount of fun!! It was a joy to introduce these little ones to the art of massage and to share with their parents the multitude of benefits that can be obtained through massaging infants and children. In case you were not there, or could not hear fully over the sounds of karate, (which by the way was excellent!!) I have written a summary of the information for all to read.

Sharing feelings of touch is something we often do naturally and instinctively with children through daily hugs or soothing rubs after they hurt themselves. To extend this further with a full body massage has enormous physical and psychological benefits. Massage improves your child's immune system making them less likely to fall sick; helps to regulate digestive, respiratory, and circulatory systems; relieves discomfort from gas and colic, congestion, and teething; and decreases production of stress hormones. Studies have shown that children who receive massage are more sociable, co-operative, happier and less likely to be aggressive. The calming effects of the massage will ensure they get a sound nights sleep and wake up refreshed. This in turn increases their ability to concentrate and participate fully in school work and other social activities.

The benefits are not only felt by the child – this also is a great relaxation time for parents, as the act of massage can also be stress relieving and relaxing for the giver and well as for the receiver. The bonding that occurs between a parent and child during this time will allow for a much more fulfilling relationship which enables them to confide in you and share their thoughts and feelings. The children also become more open to hear corrective advice or helpful suggestions from you when necessary. And once children become accustomed to massage techniques they are sure to want to try out their skills on you which is also immensely enjoyable and rewarding!

The brief body massages given at Kids Day were only on the back and head and were conducted with the child fully clothed. However for a home session the whole body can be massaged and the child can be covered with just a towel or cloth. A regular session of massage can be incorporated into your weekly schedule and an ideal time is after an evening bath when the child is clean, comfortable and winding down for sleep. Using a vegetable based oil such as coconut, sunflower, castor, or grapeseed, (baby oil is not recommended as this is a mineral oil), uncover one body part at a time and rub a little oil into the skin and softly stroke the entire area. It does not really matter where you start and you can use your fingers, thumbs and palms to gently manipulate and glide across the muscles. The child will give you feedback on the pressure and speed and the only golden rules are never to work directly on their spine or any recent injuries or operations. The timing for the massage is up to you and your child – if they start to fidget or want to stop then do not prolong the session – their ability to be still and relax will improve with each treatment. Above all enjoy it and make it fun!

Yes massage for children is certainly a wonderful thing and it is my hope that many parents will take this up on a regular basis for the health and wellbeing of their children. God willing I will be at next years Kids Day ready for more of the same as I know those who were there this year all enjoyed their treatments – and maybe by that time they will be so knowledgeable about massage they will teach me a thing or two!! In the meantime I wish you all much success and look forward to treating all the 'big people' who need a massage too!

Terri Henry – Sept 2005

Terri Henry is an ITEC qualified massage therapist. For a consultation or appointment please call 235 6256.