

Infant Massage

A guide to loving touch and
nurturing care for the newborn

Family Day Care Conference 2009

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History of Massage

Massage dates back thousands of years and has been used by many cultures as a natural and integral part of everyday parenting.

Infant massage offers a gentle and nurturing form of communication and expression of love for one's baby

Massage empowers parents and encourages increased interaction between baby and care-givers

Infant Massage Benefits

- aid digestion
- increased weight gain
- improved sleeping patterns
- facilitates bonding

Infant massage and the pre-term baby

When a baby is born prematurely, physical contact may be extremely limited.

Equipment monitoring the infant is seen as a 'clinical' or intrusive method of touch.

Infant massage offers a form of loving touch from parents and carers. It facilitates positive interaction, alleviating a feeling of helplessness often experienced by parents of pre term or unwell babies where touch may have been limited to that associated with 'painful' treatments, injections and monitoring during hospitalisation.

A Carer's Role

- For carers, particularly where there is limited physical contact between young children and their parents, the carer or extended family member can play an integral role in supporting the facilitation of nurturing, loving touch.
- Check with parents/legal guardian
- Provide feedback to parents – this can be empowering
- Ask 'permission' of child.

RESEARCH

Many published studies exist on the benefits on infant massage based on research conducted during the past 20 years particularly by T. Field/F Scafidi/S. Schanberg.

- 1986 - gained 47% more weight than average; were more alert; reduced hospital stay by 6 days
- 1990 - 21% greater daily weight gain; discharged days earlier

Dr Ruth Rice developed the first Scientifically Researched Massage Program to improve infant outcomes in 1977.

Called "The Loving Touch", this program documented the following outcomes:

Babies who were massaged regularly:

- gained weight faster
- had longer period of quiet sleep
- demonstrated enhanced neurological growth and had
- higher levels of blood oxygen

Additional Benefits

- Improved immune system
- Helps to regulate digestive, respiratory & circulatory systems
- decreased production of stress hormones

Benefits to Parents

- Provides focused time; helps to promote bonding
- Improves parent-infant communication
- Eases parental stress
- Parents became more confident

Important Considerations

Infants showed fewer stress behaviours (clenched fists etc) and lower stress hormones (cortisol levels) following massage with an oil vs massage with no oil

Massage involves a large surface area of the body and as such, extreme care should be taken when choosing a suitable product for massage.

Encourage parents to utilise products which are natural, mineral oil free and of a low-allergenic nature.

Pure plant oils whilst natural,
may still be a source of
allergic reaction.

Suitable oils include: jojoba,
sunflower and sweet almond,
cold pressed and pesticide
free and/or certified organic if
possible.



<http://indianpediatrics.net/oct2005/998.pdf>

- The above link provides results of a study conducted on 120 neonates of various gestation. For the study, coconut and safflower oils were used. This study provides an interesting insight into the absorption rate of topically applied massage oils and their various effects.

Properties including vitamins and nutrients beneficial to the skin, can be found in oils such as avocado, rosehip, calendula and evening primrose oils in particular. In small quantities added to a base oil, these oil can enhance the benefits of massage for dry or sensitive skin.

Natural vitamin e can enhance a massage oil's benefits and provide shelf life for a pre-blended product due to its natural anti-oxidant properties, helping to minimise the likelihood of rancidity.

Oil acts as a medium to enable massage to be carried out using rhythmic, fluid movements over the body.

Oil can help to combat extreme dryness and nourish the skin.

ACCORDING TO SOME
NEONATAL RESEARCH,
AROMA FREE/UNSCENTED
PRODUCTS ARE
RECOMMENDED FOR
NEWBORNS AND ARE AN
IMPORTANT CONSIDERATION
DURING AT LEAST THE FIRST
WEEKS OF BABY'S LIFE.

ALLERGIES

- Carry out patch-tests if there is a family history of allergies
- Avoid peanut oil
- Avoid soya bean oil
- Avoid wheatgerm oil

- It is essential to stress the importance of 'touch' as a therapy in its own right.

- Babies do not always respond well to massage initially.

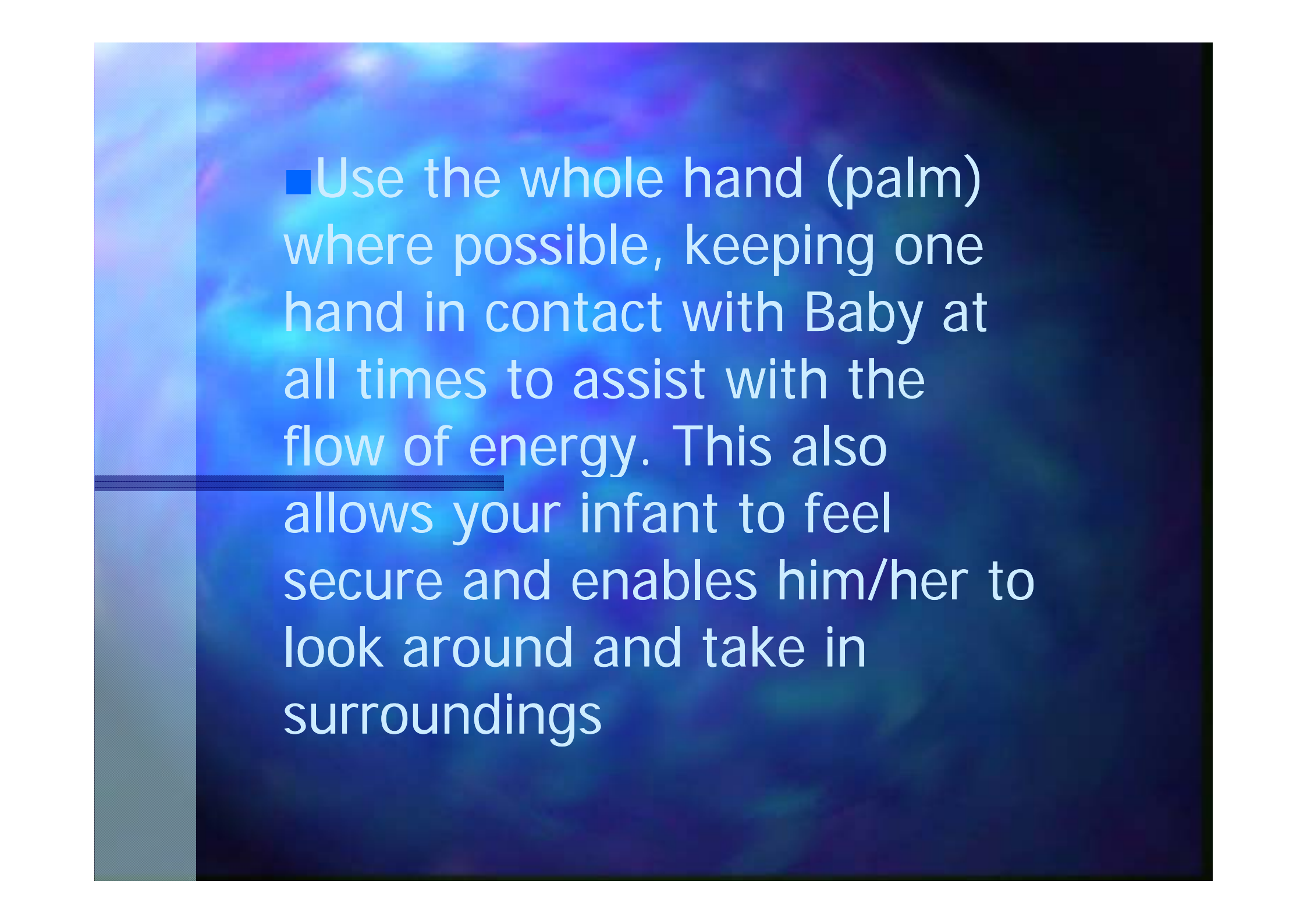
- Remind parents to observe cues from Baby

- Encourage parents to choose a special time for massage

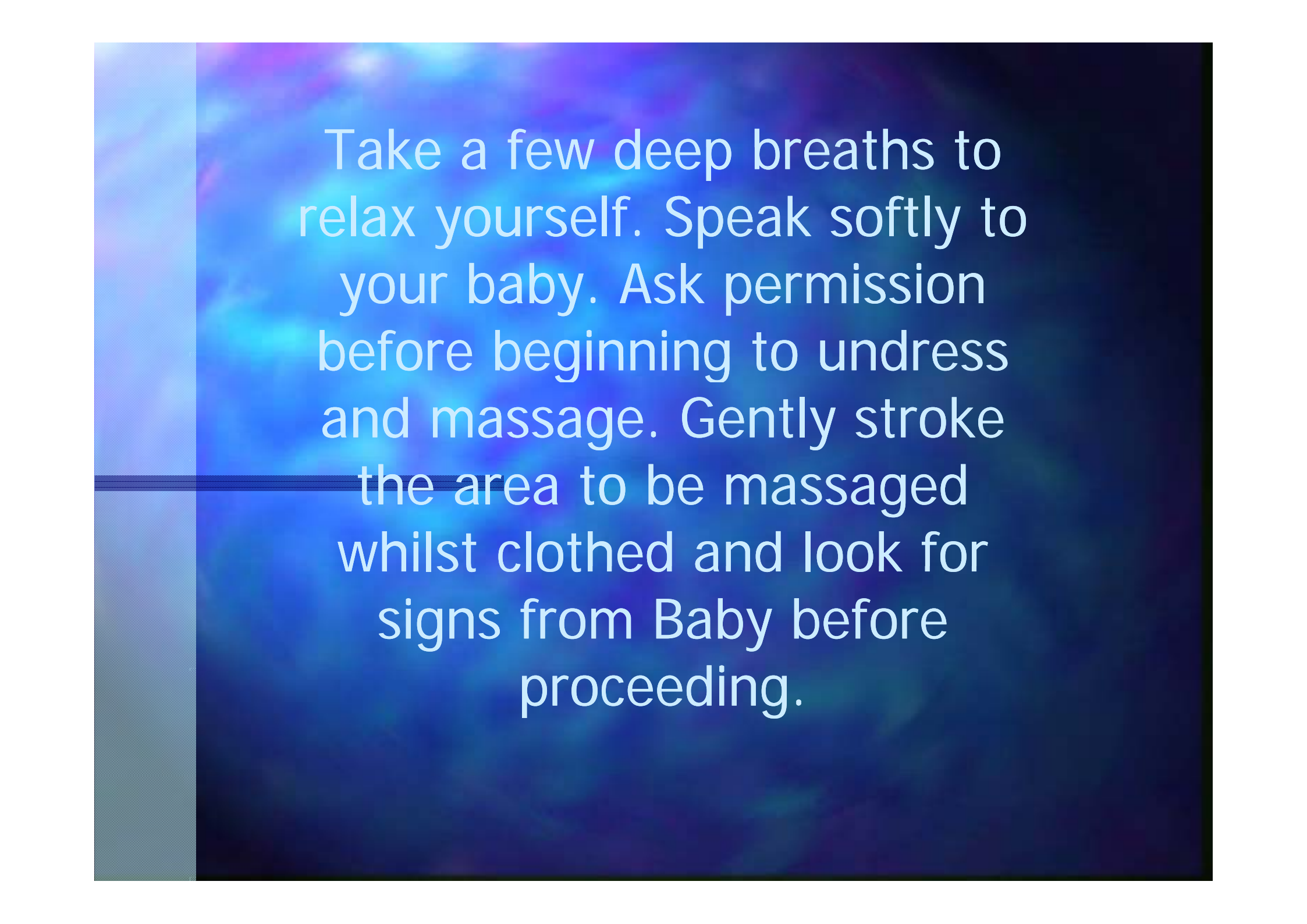
Getting Started



- Demonstrate strokes to parents on a soft-bodied doll
- Use long, fluid strokes away from the body
- Begin at the legs
- Massage when Baby is in a quiet 'awake' state



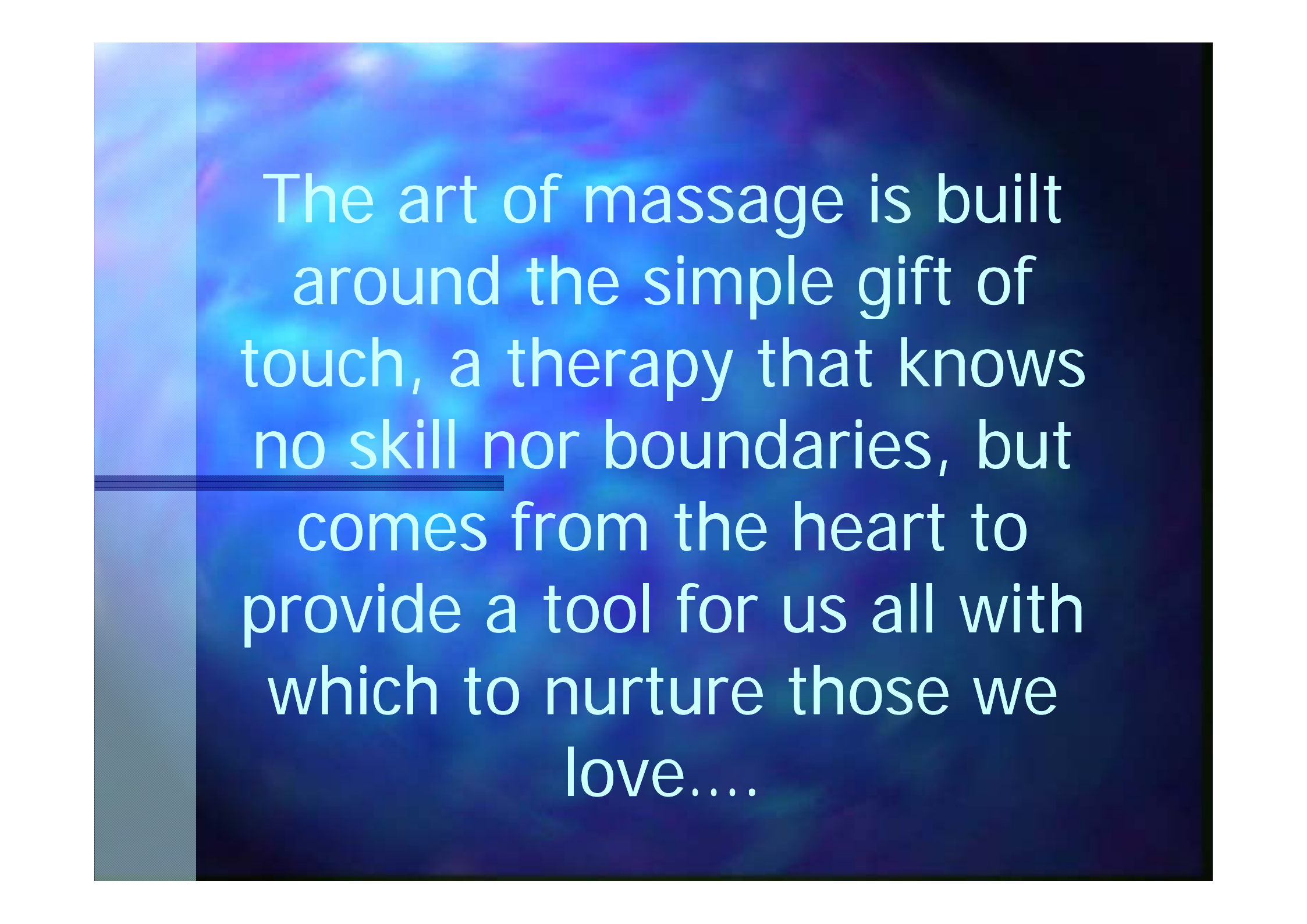
- Use the whole hand (palm) where possible, keeping one hand in contact with Baby at all times to assist with the flow of energy. This also allows your infant to feel secure and enables him/her to look around and take in surroundings



Take a few deep breaths to relax yourself. Speak softly to your baby. Ask permission before beginning to undress and massage. Gently stroke the area to be massaged whilst clothed and look for signs from Baby before proceeding.

The Mobile Baby

- Massage can become increasingly challenging as Baby becomes mobile.
- Try modifying massage to suit the child's age and expected outcome – massage for relaxation/massage for stimulation etc.
- Avoid restricting Baby's movements, rather 'move with' the child.



The art of massage is built
around the simple gift of
touch, a therapy that knows
no skill nor boundaries, but
comes from the heart to
provide a tool for us all with
which to nurture those we
love....

Information and research on infant
massage can be found by visiting
www.infantmassage.org.au (Infant
Massage Australia) or
www.iaim.com.au (International
Association of Infant Massage) our
two professional infant massage
associations in Australia

The beginning.....



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