

# New babies, parents need special quiet time

By Barbara Bathony, ANP

"Bonding does not refer to mutual affection between a baby and an adult but to the phenomenon whereby adults become committed by a one-way flow of affection to children for whom they have cared during the first months and years of life" from Robertson, *A Baby in the Family*, Penguin in Press, London.

Bonding is not dependent on the eye to eye contact with the infant during the first hour of life and sentimentality has no part of it. It is a bond formed between two humans usually greatest with mother, somewhat less in the father and minutely less with other family members.

How to promote this bond? These are some suggestions (all health care personnel) one can assist in:

1) Assess the special needs of the mom by looking at her previous pregnancies, her desires for the birth experience, what she is looking forward to in her infant and the kind of mothering she received herself. This cultural bond is very deep and we can optimize the mother's experience by promoting the best in her cultural background and environment.

2) Parent preparation: Group prenatal classes, a tour of the hospital, and discussion of what life is all about as brand new mom help relieve anxiety. It also lets parents share experience of normal pregnancies and in turn become an active participant rather than a victim.

3) Mothers need a companion throughout the labor process for guidance and reassurance. A companion could be the husband, mother, nurse, midwife, doctor or friend. No woman should have to go through labor alone without

4) The Parent-infant bond can be enhanced by giving the couple privacy. The time of infant contact could be extended and it is best to give

the mother responsibility for the available care of the infant with the nurse as consultant.

5) The first hour, it would be nice to have 15-20 minutes alone in privacy between parents and infant. After delivery is complete the infant could lie on top of mother's bare chest, pressing it gently against her, covering both with a warm blanket. The eye medication sometimes can be postponed until the infant is one hour old. Taking a picture of this very special moment can prolong the beauty of the memory for months to come.

6) Rooming in. An infant should be at mother's side at least six hours a day. It allows the bond to increase by assuring the mom that all those strange things the infant is doing, (sneezing, mustard stool, etc.) are normal. The nurse only acts as a resource and teacher.

Giving the new mother an opportunity to chat with other moms makes her realize her own infant is normal. The parent-infant contact by having the baby in the same hospital room with the mother (minimum of 6 hrs.) is especially important when there has been a separation as, for example, a caesarean section or illness.

7) Bonding can be enhanced by an early discharge to a home where the new mom has a supportive husband and family to take over household chores and not baby care. This gives mother time to spend in caring for and enjoying her infant.

8) I believe, supported by many research studies, that parents should have a choice in many decisions associated with labor and delivery. Some of these are: The birth environment, who should be present, choice of drugs, use of electrical fetal monitor, shaving and so on. Good prenatal teaching can provide



moms with background in making a wise choice. Moms should be encouraged to ask their moms and families: "What worked best for you?" Grandmothers are a wealthy store of information and can pass on to their offspring the extricacies and disappointments of their labor and delivery.

9) To increase the bond to

the infant breastfeeding is recommended. It was found by DeCarvalho (1981) that women who breastfed the baby when it demanded it (could be between 8-20 times in 24 hours) during the first 14 days of life had less breast soreness, lower bilirubin levels and moms have more milk at 30 days.

The bond between parent and infant is deep. Only the first 24-28 hours does the mom look at her baby objectively, after that it suddenly becomes the greatest and most beautiful baby born. Let's all help this exhilarating human experience to grow by supporting the parents' efforts to establish this long lasting bond.