



Radio Stations	:	All Community Radio Stations
Subject	:	Early Childhood Development
Audience	:	Parents, caregivers and educators
Program Topic	:	Kangaroo mother care (Protection)

Guidelines to the presenter

- Presenter – please familiarize yourself with the brief and the use the facts effectively by referring to them from time to time during the show.
- You should be seen as a peer, rather than an authority.
- Offer guidance or opinion, rather than telling people what to do.
- Encourage people to seek further information – including referring to the Ilifa website: www.ilifalabantwana.co.za.
- Always keep the objectives and outcomes in mind and drive these.

Topic

Kangaroo mother care

Objectives

- Promote understanding of kangaroo mother care
- Enable an understanding of the importance of skin to skin contact for all babies
- Enable an understanding of premature and low birth weight babies and the care needed for them
- Reaffirm the importance of exclusive breastfeeding
- Highlight a role for fathers in newborn care

Introduction

Last week we talked about how having as healthy a pregnancy as possible is important for your child's health development. This week, we move on to the moments immediately after birth, to find out about a method of child care vital to your baby's immediate and longer-term health and development.

Questions	Facts/Information
<p>1. <i>The name 'kangaroo mother care' is intriguing – what does the term mean?</i></p>	<p>Kangaroo mother care is a method of care for newborn babies. According to the World Health Organisation, the method covers an integrated package of care, comprising skin to skin contact starting early, PLUS exclusive or near-exclusive breastfeeding, PLUS support for parents, PLUS early discharge from the maternity unit. It's sometimes also known by the abbreviation, 'KMC'.</p>
<p>2. <i>Why is it called 'kangaroo' care?</i></p>	<p>The name comes from the similarity to the care given by marsupials, such as kangaroos, to their newborn young. Mother kangaroos care for their tiny newborns initially in their pouches, keeping them constantly warm and close to their nipple, so they can feed non-stop. This way the babies are carried by their mothers, protected, fed and provided with a total environment essential for their development.</p>
<p>3. <i>Why is such a method of care also important for human babies?</i></p>	<p>Compared to many mammals, human babies are very immature and unable to fend for themselves. For the human baby, therefore, skin-to-skin contact on the mother's chest provides the essentials: warmth, breast milk, comfort, stimulation and protection.</p>
<p>4. <i>When did kangaroo mother care first start being used for newborns?</i></p>	<p>Two doctors, working in Bogota, the capital city of Colombia in South America, were probably the first to use the term 'kangaroo care', in the late 1970s. They used it in the context of caring for premature babies as an alternative to inadequate and insufficient incubator care for premature newborns, who</p>

<p>5. <i>So, how does it work as a method of care for premature babies?</i></p> <p>6. <i>What effect does kangaroo mother care have on the baby?</i></p>	<p>needed special care to feed and grow.</p> <p>In countries, where there are few or no incubators available in hospitals, this method can be life-saving for premature babies, who are born with low birth weight. It works because the baby on the mother's chest does not get cold, so the lungs function better. The baby in skin-to-skin contact also feels safe with the mum's familiar heartbeat and voice so she does not become stressed and her heart rate, blood pressure and breathing stabilise faster. On the mum's chest the baby also stimulates the production of breast milk. This milk is vital for providing the preterm baby with the exact food needed to grow her brain. Numerous studies have shown kangaroo mother care to be a safe and effective method of caring for low birth weight infants.</p> <p>Studies have shown that it can result in a reduction in mortality. Premature babies are at risk of hypothermia, but skin to skin contact keeps them constantly warm, so less at risk of it. They are also less at risk of respiratory tract infections and the kinds of infections caught in hospital. Preterm babies studied who were exposed to this method of care also showed better mental development and better motor development. Furthermore, heart and breathing rates, sleep patterns and behaviour observed in preterm/ low birth weight babies held skin to skin tend to be similar or better than those seen in babies separate from their mothers.</p>
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<p>7. <i>Is it common to find babies born premature or with a low birth weight?</i></p>	<p>Around 25 million low birth weight babies are born every year in the world – that means babies born alive who weigh less than 2.5kg at birth. This happens because they are either born preterm or have experienced impaired prenatal growth – the second case is a particular problem in less developed countries. These circumstances contribute significantly to high rates of newborn death, commonly associated with poverty – 96% of low birth weight babies are born in developing countries. Premature and low birth weight babies represent more than one fifth of the estimated 4 million neonatal deaths each year. In South Africa, 9% of babies are born with low birth weight each year. But in some provinces the rate is much higher – in the Northern Cape, for instance, 24% of babies are with low birth weight. A lot of births, and thus birth weights, are still not documented, however, so the rate in South Africa could actually be much higher.</p>
<p>8. <i>You mentioned that low birth weight is often caused by impaired prenatal growth. What causes this?</i></p>	<p>The health of the mother has a big impact on the development of her baby in the womb. If the mother is under-nourished, in poor health, or too young, there is a greater chance of pregnancy or labour-related complications, including the baby being born with a low birth weight. Substance abuse by women during pregnancy may also have an effect on the development and weight of their unborn child. Infants born with low birth weight are at risk of a number of health conditions. They may not be able to gain sufficient weight, and may suffer long-term health problems such as developmental delay and other disabilities.</p>

<p>9. <i>We've been talking about premature and low weight newborns, but is kangaroo mother care important just for them?</i></p>	<p>No, not at all. It's now being recognised as beneficial for all babies, whether preterm or full term. Being with the mother on her chest at birth should be the normal situation for every baby at birth. Being separated from the mother creates stress in all babies. Some can cope OK with stress, but others are more sensitive and end up as more vulnerable and even get sick. Skin to skin contact on the mum's chest is where babies stabilise, grow and develop the best. There any baby can eat and sleep peacefully and can use all of her energy to grow well. She is reassured by mum's familiar smell and heartbeat and voice. Kangaroo mother care should start. irrespective of gestational age or weight, as soon as the baby is stable.</p>
<p>10. <i>How does this help with breastfeeding?</i></p>	<p>As you know, exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months is the best thing for most mothers and babies. Skin to skin contact helps with this, as the baby is protected by her mother's arms and is held close and feels safe. In this safe place the baby can start her vital first movements towards breastfeeding and start nuzzling the breast. This sends messages to the part of the mother's brain called the hypothalamus to start making prolactin, the protein needed to produce milk. So in skin-to-skin contact at birth we have the vital start of breast milk being made. And studies have shown that mothers doing this have significantly higher milk production than other mothers and are practising a higher rate of breastfeeding.</p>

11. What else happens with skin to skin contact and breastfeeding?

During breastfeeding all the senses work together to make pathways and circuits into networks. So taste and smell, as well as sight and sound and warmth and touch and pressure and balance and movement – are integrated. A powerful hormone called oxytocin is also produced. This is often known as the ‘love hormone’, as it is the hormone that helps create the bond between mother and child. It is stimulated by hugging or breastfeeding and acts as a neurotransmitter to the brain, helping to create feelings of security. So, with skin to skin contact and breastfeeding, the baby’s basic needs are being met and there is an essential bond created with the mother who provides those needs. The secure attachment between the mother and baby is the secure base from which the child can now develop well, physically and mentally.

12. Is there a role for fathers in this kind of care for newborns?

Certainly! This method is sometimes just called ‘kangaroo care’, rather than ‘kangaroo mother care’, to recognise the role of fathers. For dads, carrying your baby in skin to skin contact on your chest at birth will help her stabilise, too. It will be a wonderful bonding time for both of you. Babies need their dads and you can do most things in caring for your baby: You can hold her, change her nappy, carry her, talk and sing just as well as mum. The only thing you can’t do, is breastfeed!

Dads, in the first few weeks after birth and skin to skin contact, you will find that your baby will feel safe with you, and it will be the beginning of a deep relationship for both of you. Both parents are empowered through gaining confidence in handling their infant,

<p><i>13. Apart from skin to skin contact and exclusive breastfeeding, what are the other important parts of kangaroo mother care?</i></p>	<p>resulting in better bonding and less chance of child abuse and neglect.</p> <p>As I mentioned at the beginning, two important aspects of this method are support for the mother-baby pair and early discharge from the maternity unit. It's really important that a mother and her newborn be seen as a single unit and be supported in this way both in the hospital and after discharge, at home and with follow-up care from the health service. Provided that this support is available, the mother is continuing with skin to skin care and the baby is well and gaining weight on the mother's milk, they can be discharged as early as possible.</p>
<p><i>14. How should families be helped to implement kangaroo care?</i></p>	<p>Mothers should have the concept of kangaroo mother care explained and demonstrated to them in the antenatal clinic. The explanations and demonstrations should continue after the baby is born until the mother is motivated and able to put the baby in the Kangaroo Position by herself and to breastfeed. Staff at all levels of neonatal care should be able to educate parents about the method, to assist them with positioning of the infant, drips, oxygen tubing, feeding, and to discuss any queries they might have. Mothers need strong emotional support and practical guidelines for prolonged kangaroo mother care (e.g. in the absence of incubators). Other people supporting the mum, especially the father, should be involved in kangaroo mother care training as early as possible, together with the mother, while the baby is still in the Neonatal Unit.</p>

Conclusion

Mothers are central to the care of their newborn infants and should never be separated from them. As we've heard today, a baby needs to be held by her mother for physical, emotional and mental well-being. Kangaroo care is a simple and essential way of caring for newborn babies, which has long-term positive benefits for their development and is a great way for mothers and fathers to bond well with their babies.

Learning outcomes

After listening to this show the audience should:

- Have a good understanding of what kangaroo mother care is.
- Begin to understand about premature and low birth weight babies, why this happens and why they need special care.
- Understand the importance for the health and development of new-born babies of skin-to-skin contact and exclusive breastfeeding.
- Understand why it's important to keep new-born babies and mothers together right from birth.
- Understand the role of fathers in caring for and bonding with their newborns.