

## Is it ethical to not provide infant and family centred developmental care initiatives?

our actions impact those beyond ourselves. In other words, ethics is other regarding; and, it is also normative in the sense that how we act is expressive of notions of good, value, meaning, and so forth. For this paper, let us consider the question: “Is it ethical to not provide infant and family centred developmental care initiatives?” These initiatives can be understood broadly as those activities designed to support the medical and developmental needs of infants, especially preterm or critically ill newborns, while also involving their families as essential partners in care. Let us take kangaroo care as an example.

Kangaroo care, the practice of skin-to-skin contact between a newborn and their parent, generally raises few ethical concerns.<sup>7,8</sup> We could say it is expressive of a fundamental human encounter. Consider a mother’s words,

*Kangaroo care, holding him skin-to-skin, is our time. It’s so settling to feel his warm skin against mine. I get him nestled in, on my chest, and just lay my hands over him. His breathing steadies. He holds a breath, I hold a breath. I find myself sighing without even meaning to just as he exhales. It’s like my body senses his and harmonizes with his. I do not normally even give it any thought. We just are together sensing each other’s heart beat. Sometimes I will read a book with my free hand. Other times, a friend will be there and we talk quietly. I don’t really need to concentrate on him; I am feeling him as he is feeling me. To have him close – it just feels so good, so calm. Sometimes we just need to lie there together and let the day pass by. (from van Manen, 2021, p. 59)<sup>9</sup>*

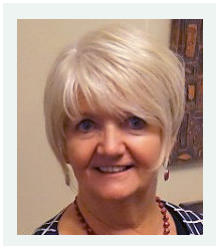
Reading this mother’s words, we may hear how all of the wires and tubes, the pumps and monitors, the nurses and doctors may fade into the background to reveal a mother who is in touch with and touches her child in a moment of bodily presence. They lie attached in touch. They breathe in touch. They are touched by each other’s touch. And from this attached being of touching emerges the being of mother with child. Do we dare question its ethics? Well, if we regard kangaroo care as an initiative, if we think of it as a healthcare practice, we recognize that its ethics may be valued based on how it meets principled considerations.

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## Editorial

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## Families at the Heart of NIDCAP



In this issue, we highlight the exciting initiatives taking place within a developmental care framework using the NIDCAP model. Each contribution reminds us that families are central to the care of their newborns and that supporting them is at the heart of everything we do.

Michael van Manen invites us to reflect on important ethical questions as

we support parents providing kangaroo care in a busy NICU environment. Katie Reginato Cascamo explores the vital role of parental intuition, showing how clinicians can recognize and build upon it to strengthen parents’ involvement in their baby’s care. From Doha in Qatar, Bindu George and her team describe their innovative family-integrated model, offering insight into how developmental care can be embraced within a culturally diverse setting. We also hear directly from families themselves, as Stephanie Ernst shares her story and deeply personal journey through the NICU.

From Salzburg, Austria, the Amadea NIDCAP Training Centre shares their own journey and new initiatives, while Joy

Browne and the team from Ghent provide thoughtful questions for reflection as they mentor trainers-in-training. Together, these accounts highlight how nurturing those who teach and learn NIDCAP strengthens the training process—and ultimately benefits babies and their families.

We also hear from Marjorie Palmer, who provides an insightful perspective on recognizing early signs of Autistic Spectrum Disorder through infant sucking cues, reminding us of the subtle ways infants communicate their needs.

Finally, I extend an invitation: would you like to be part of the Developmental Observer team? We are seeking members to join our review group. No prior reviewing experience is necessary—our team will support and guide you through the process. If you are interested, please send an email with your expression of interest.

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