

Book Review

The Developing Infant: A Guide to Infant Mental Health and Well Being, Annie Brook, PhD, LPC, 2017. Boulder, CO: Smart Body Books. ISBN: 9760449-7

The Developing Infant: A Guide to Infant Mental Health and Well Being is an accessible, “hands-on practice guide” the author developed from her decades of work in the fields of movement, human development, and psychology. Brook skillfully weaves together her extensive knowledge of somatic psychology, neuroscience, and both physical and social-emotional development in a readable, easy-to-use format designed for caregivers of prenatates through 18-month-olds. Brook is clear that she believes this early childhood time period is where societal attention and funding should be focused. She writes,

The ability to inhabit a body, to perceive and respond coherently to stimulation, to connect with others, and to engage in coordinated movement are the tasks of our infants. They must learn to regulate sensation and intensity, to feel comfort, to trust, and to bond and open their hearts. ...Infant development is brain development, and the time to devote our largest resources, education, and community funding support. (p. xi)

The book is divided into four learning sections, in addition to a practice guide. The first section is an overview of the author’s insights, and contains ways to support infants. The second covers working with prenatates, premature infants, and newborns. The third section explores working with babies between the ages of one and six months, and the specifics of their development. The fourth is devoted to babies from age seven months through walking. In each of these sections, Brook describes infant observation skills for the particular age group. Finally, the practice guide section focuses on the reader’s own “inside-out-learning,” (p. xviii), and encourages the reader to somatically practice given skills, with the belief that the embodiment of this learning will help guide the reader in working with babies.

In the overview, the author provides ways to build infant mental health, recognize and treat perinatal and birth trauma, encourage

movement and brain development, develop self-care strategies for caregivers, and observe, understand, and safely touch infants. Brook also includes things to avoid with infants, such as propping an infant up and prolonged time in a car seat.

Section one explores prenatal movements and implicit memory, what premature infants need (such as prolonged skin-to-skin contact), and the world of the newborn. The author encourages the reader to observe the baby when he or she is both awake and asleep, and writes, “Be curious if you see behaviors that don’t make sense” (p. 30). Brook details somatic movements to look for, and discusses nursing and emotional support for the newborn if bonding and attachment were interrupted or trauma was involved; for example, she encourages naming birth events aloud to the infant (when the parent is not in shock) in order to help the infant process the experience and know that he or she is safe.

In section two, Brook discusses the psychological birth and needs of the infant, infant crying, baby-wearing, and developmentally-appropriate toys for infants ages one to six months. She describes the satisfaction cycle from Body-Mind Centering (p. 60), and the building blocks of developmental learning. Brook includes what to observe in the one-to-six-month-old infant, including developmental movement. She provides many pieces of solid advice for caregivers of this age group, such as, “To enjoy your baby most, and learn their language, get down on the floor with your baby. Be at eye level with them ...” (p. 52), and “Be sure to stay connected to your own body and needs. Remember, infant pacing is 6-10 times slower than adult processing speeds” (p. 53).

Section three looks at the stage of locomotion — age seven months to walking. The author discusses unconscious power dynamics that might occur between caregiver and child, attachment styles, shock and trauma, and the formation of identity beliefs in the infant. Brook then explores observation skills for caregivers of this age group. She writes about how addressing these issues at any age, which are formed pre-verbally and held in implicit memory, can help one to move through long-standing patterns that no longer serve. Brook writes,

Revisiting cellular memories of infant experience can move events out of existential threat response into an integrated notion that one survived; one can name events to give them context and repattern the bodymind through touch and movement. This brings new information to the brain, ease to the nervous system, and allows one to ‘grow up and out of’ brain confusion and pre-patterned behaviors (p. 75).

The book contains 15 appendices, including Brook's personal story of how she came to this work, infant touch skills, various movement patterns and skills to develop them, anatomy of the brain and of an infant's body systems, and ways to release shock. Additionally, the author includes appendices on the effects of circumcision and tips for new parents.

Having worked with Annie Brook and the body of knowledge she illustrates for many years — taking, and then assisting in, her training program, and consistently using parts of this work with both my clinical clients in practice and my own children at home — I can attest that the wisdom contained within both the author and her latest book has been transformative on many levels. *The Developing Infant: A Guide to Infant Mental Health and Well* is written in such a way as to be digestible for the novice parent with little background in caregiving, making it an extremely useful borrowing book for parents in my office library. However, it also contains a wealth of information useful for clinical experts in this expansive field, in working with both parents and their infants, and with older children and adults needing to heal challenging early imprints.

Stephanie Dueger, PhD, LPC
JOPPPAH Assistant Editor
Drduegertherapy.com