

Research highlight: Kangaroo care and the effect on newborns

July 25 2013, by Lainie Rusco

Barb Morrison is talking to anyone she can about something dear to her heart: kangaroo care.

Morrison is a certified nurse midwife and associate professor in Wichita State University's Janice M. Riordan Distinguished Professorship in Maternal and Child Health in the WSU School of Nursing.

A longtime vocal advocate of breastfeeding, Morrison is also spreading her message about the importance of kangaroo care.

Named for the similarity to how marsupials carry their young, kangaroo care is a technique practiced on newborns wherein the infant is held skin-to-skin by an adult.

It's a common practice for [premature babies](#), but it is becoming increasingly more popular for full-term newborns, as well. For good reason, Morrison said.

Kangaroo care strengthens the bond between parent and child, helps facilitate breastfeeding and encourages forebrain/[social brain](#) development in the infant.

More hospitals, including those in Wichita, are urging new parents to spend extra skin-to-skin time with their babies directly after birth.

And Morrison said kangaroo care is something parents can, and should,

practice for up to 2 years.

Morrison has taken the lead in a year-long campaign, getting her message out to news outlets, hospitals and medical professionals.

"As birth practices are changing in the hospitals, we are anticipating this campaign will help in the education of parents, grandparents and care providers so we all can promote the best care for our newborns and infants."

A rediscovery

Morrison said the implications of kangaroo care are important. That close contact with a caregiver could change the social, emotional and cognitive development of every child.

"Parents want their infants to grow into intelligent, creative, caring adults, an effort that starts at birth," she said.

The care currently provided to [newborn infants](#) may interfere with that goal and cause more harm than good, Morrison said. Separation of child from caregiver can lead to different [brain development](#), including over development of the midbrain or primitive brain, which controls behaviors such as aggression.

"While we may want our children to develop independence, it's not appropriate at such a young age," she said. "Newborns need warmth, protection, comfort and ready access to food. They need a habitat that provides for all their needs without stressing them. That habitat is skin-to-skin on mom's chest, or kangaroo care."

Morrison said [kangaroo](#) care is a rediscovery of the instinctual relationship between mothers and their infants.

"There's a dance that goes on between mothers and their infants, the initiation of communication," she said. "We did not survive as a species without holding and skin-to-skin touch."

Provided by Wichita State University

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