

CASE STUDY

LISTENING TO BABIES: A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO NAPPY CHANGING



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Have you ever wondered how a different approach to the simple nappy change routine in a nursery baby room can lead to a whole host of improved experiences for all, across the setting?

This case study highlights how a more holistic and respectful approach to nappy changing routines at The Barn led to development of secure attachments with caregivers and enhanced social interaction, communication and language, through positive interactions.

As a necessary part of a baby's daily routine, nappy changing can be seen as a chore, something to be done quickly, especially in a busy baby room where a 'conveyor-belt' changing routine is considered the most effective and best practice.

“ RESPECTFUL CARE ”

As my setting's Quality Practice Manager, I asked myself if nappy changing could be more in line with our nursery ethos; our ethos surrounds the unique child, following their interests, allowing them the autonomy to make choices and have their voice heard. We wish for the children in our care to be confident, resilient, independent and be active in their own learning and development.

So, I decided to adapt the nappy changing routine to encompass this ethos by offering the highest level of 'respectful care', a term penned by Dr Emmi Pikler, a family paediatrician in Budapest in the 1930's.

VISUAL CUES AND INVITING

Firstly, and most importantly, our baby room team were part of the discussions, ensuring they understood the reasoning behind the changes needed whilst also allowing them a chance to contribute their thoughts and ideas. Particular attention was paid to the indoor changing area, where visual cues to support the teams' understanding and remind them of the key elements of nappy changing as a holistic process were incorporated into the natural, calming environment. For example:

- Is the environment clean, tidy, warm and welcoming?
- Is the child engaged with no distractions?
- Remember to be calm. There is no rush.
- Is your voice soothing and gentle?
- Have you invited the child to have their nappy changed?
- Ensure you make eye contact, and your expressions are positive.
- Remember to be attentive to the child's cues.



FULLY INVOLVED

From here, many adaptations were made to ensure the child was fully involved, at the centre of the process and that the experience was respectful and positive through the teams' interactions from the outset.

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On a rota basis, one member of staff became responsible for nappy changing. Not only did this create the space, time and two-way interaction that is needed for such intimate care, it also provided the opportunity for the child to build secure attachments with all members of the baby room team.

Psychologists John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth, who developed 'attachment theory' emphasised the importance of multiple secure attachments in fostering healthy emotional development, social competence and resilience, leading to better future outcomes.



ENGAGEMENT DURING THE PROCESS

Furthermore, incorporating Makaton to support communication, using the nappy as a visual aid and being down at the child's level, the child had a clear understanding of what was happening and were allowed time to process this and cooperate in their own time. All children were encouraged to be as independent as was developmentally appropriate. If a child could walk, then they walked to be changed rather than being carried. To further build on the child's communication, independence and involvement in the whole process, they were supported to identify their own personal belongings box from recognising their face on the front.

Simple questioning was used: "Where's [John]?" and then building on the communication as the understanding grew: "Where's [John's] box?" leading to, "Can you find your box?" resulting in the children independently walking to their box where they were then supported to find their nappy changing equipment and carry it to the changing area.

Engagement between the practitioner and the child during the physical changing of the nappy involved narrating the process as well as meaningful interaction of talking, singing and eye contact, creating a positive, bonding experience.

SO WHAT IS THE IMPACT?

Many years on, no longer do I observe nappy changing to be merely a routine process carried out twice daily, with 2 members of staff changing children's nappies side by side, quietly and quickly. This new approach is now embedded practice in our baby room and has had many positive impacts, not only for the individual child, but for the efficient running of the baby room overall.

Having an extra member of staff on the floor with all the other children has led to less disruption to the interactions with the other children as well as smooth running and fluidity of the day. The revised routine has ensured that our ethos and curriculum are also interwoven during every moment of this process. Each child, regardless of their level of development, has agency over their nappy changing routine from start to finish, increasing their independence and communication skills, whilst forming positive secure attachments with every member of the team, further supporting their social communication development and resilience.

It is a common theme to focus on every aspect of life at The Barn and ensure it fits with our aims and ethos; even such small, simple improvements to daily routines can have positive, widespread and long-lasting impacts for both the children and their caregivers.