

Description

Sensitive Midwifery, Sensitive Care

Sheena Byrom OBE (she/her) – Midwife

Social @Sheena_Byrom

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Introduction

It was 1986 when I first read midwife Caroline Flint's book Sensitive Midwifery[1] and I was hooked. The book was the only text that focused on my wellbeing as a midwife and a woman – encouraging me to cherish myself every day. It was my introduction to self-care. I was so encouraged and enlightened by Caroline's words that I still practice some of the things she suggested. This author, 38 years later, has re-written Sensitive Midwifery and has added much more content. It is still the loving resource that, she says, is 'a bouquet to acknowledge your actions, your kindness' and much more. The detail on how to sustain ourselves at home and at work is exquisite and with beautifully sketched images, Caroline demonstrates how to sensitively care for those we serve too.[2]

Being sensitive to needs

'Sensitive' is an adjective that describes deep emotion and whilst its meaning depends on context it can sometimes be used to demonstrate fragility or failing. 'Sensitive' can infer that something or someone is easily influenced by external factors. This is each one of us, right? I'm sensitive to loud noise and I've cared for women in labour who were sensitive to perfume. Being sensitive to women and families' needs and requests is the art of midwifery and the essence of person- centred maternity care. As midwives we can endeavour to provide trauma-informed care which includes being tactful and considerate in how we communicate with others, especially in delicate situations. A sensitive approach includes being aware of the feelings of others and acting accordingly. We can extend these considerations to those we work with too.

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The babies we care for have many sensitivities. We witness them opening their eyes for the first time and blinking with the light. Midwives can make it easier for them by reducing the brightness. Newborns are sensitive to touch and smell, soon gaining the ability to recognise their primary carer, usually the mother.[3] Secure attachment depends on parents being sensitive to their child's needs[4] – preferably from birth. Maternity care staff can support this interaction by understanding the underpinning physiology and ensuring zero separation of mother and baby.

Loving the babies!

Babies' skin is sensitive too and needs careful attention. Newborn skin is five times thinner than adult skin and is more prone to irritation, dryness and allergic reactions. Babies' skin also has a less developed barrier, which means it can absorb substances more easily and lose moisture quickly. This needs to be taken into consideration when giving parents advice about appropriate products and techniques to use when cleansing and bathing their new baby.[5] Fragrance free products are preferable if the baby has extra sensitive skin or conditions such as eczema.

Very young babies do not need daily baths, it's enough to clean baby's face, neck, hands and genitals with warm water only.[5] If parents wish to use products at any stage, suggest the use of gentle products and to try to protect their baby's skin from harsh environments. Highly-sensitive skin needs very special care.

Wellbeing for all

Being sensitive can mean we are more empathetic. This empathy can lead to acts of kindness and compassion, which not only improve the lives of others but also create a sense of purpose and wellbeing in our own lives. **TPM**

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