

TLC Showcase

DILYS DAWS AND ALEXANDRA DE REMENTERIA

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Introduction to the book

TLC is a lovely witty name for a literary consultancy. We clients certainly feel looked after, but perhaps the first two letters should stand for 'Tough Love'!

As a Child Psychotherapist I had written many academic papers, co-edited books and was successful in writing simply and understandably for other disciplines, and sometimes more widely for parents. I had co-edited the first book on child psychotherapy in the UK, and written a book (*Through the Night: Helping Parents and Sleepless Infants*) which helps parents and professionals to understand why babies might have trouble sleeping. Many professionals have told me that this book has inspired them to transform their way of working.

However, when I was invited by a world-wide publishing house to write a book for parents, it didn't work. I was flattered to be asked, but it was the wrong time, and my first draft was flat. I was about to retire from my job as a Consultant Child Psychotherapist at the Tavistock Clinic and should have been concentrating on finishing off my NHS paperwork! I couldn't work out what was wrong, and left the draft in my filing cabinet.

Several eventful years elapsed, working in Infant Mental Health, and with family illness and bereavement, and the excitement of the birth of six grandchildren, until I picked up the draft again.

I was lucky then to find a co-writer, Alex de Rementería, a former teacher, who had done the MA in Infant Mental Health at the Tavistock that I taught on, was then on maternity leave and is now in specialist training as a Child Psychotherapist. She was the new generation with hands-on experience as a mother, and with up-to-date experience of current Child Development Research.

We approached TLC and Becky found Anna South as our reader. Anna was the perfect match for us. She had previously published non-fiction at Penguin, had young children, and a special interest in publications for parents. Anna read the existing draft, and it was then that we learnt that the T of TLC also stands for 'Truth'!

Anna kindly said that my prose 'speaks of great empathy, compassion and indeed a burning interest in your subject matter'. She continued 'Now comes the 'but' - in its

current form the book was 'chaotic, muddled and lacking in focus'. She then gave a careful unpicking of its strengths and weaknesses. It was a great relief to have these set out, and we felt that the basic quality of the book was respected.

Alex and I realised as we took in Anna's insights that it took courage to write this book, to face problems honestly without empty reassurance but without pathologising or making parents feel doomed by difficult life experiences to have problems with their baby. In fact, the courage needed to be a psychotherapist, and the courage needed to read this book! We think that the book makes the problems understandable and may give parents the courage to solve them.

The illustrations by Ros Asquith are brilliant, and wittily portray conflicting ideas. Look to see how she deals with the elusive problem of colic!

About the book, our publisher Routledge says:

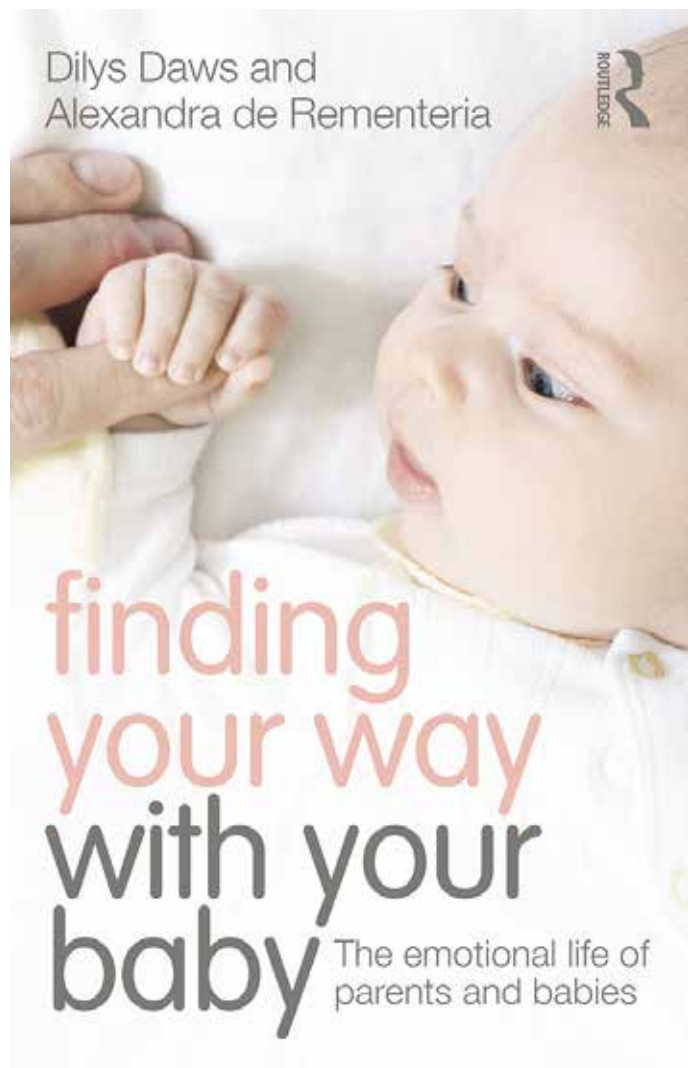
'This book explores the emotional experience of the baby in the first year, and that of the mother, father and other significant adults. It does so in a way that is deeply informed by psychoanalytic understandings, infant observation, developmental science and decades of clinical experience. Combining the wisdom of many year's work with the freshness of up-to-date knowledge, the authors tackle the difficult emotional experiences often glossed over in parenting books- pregnancy, through birth into bonding, ambivalence about the baby, depression, and the emotional turmoil of being a new parent-as well as providing new insight into commonly covered issues such as feeding, weaning, sleeping and crying.

Finding Your Way With Your Baby is primarily aimed at parents but it will be a useful resource for health visitors, social workers, GPs and other infant mental health professionals.'

Extracts from 'Finding Your Way With Your Baby'

You don't have to be perfect

It is hard to remember this when the stakes are so high. The way that you parent will impact on your baby's developing personality. Yet, hoping to attain perfection in parenting is not only impossible, it is not actually desirable. Winnicott (1958) coined the phrase "the good enough mother" - a brilliantly helpful concept that applies to fathers too. 'Good-enough' means just that - able to be reliably there for your baby, but a fallible human being, with your own needs, bad days and irritable moods.. If you make mistakes you can learn from them and so can your baby. Early on the baby's whole experience is of her parents and she needs some introduction to the normal frustrations of life; having to wait a little sometimes or of having to deal with a parent who isn't in tune with her in that moment. The need for the baby to make allowances for her parents, as well as them usually adjusting to her, helps her develop in her thinking, and her ability to empathise with others. A baby of a few weeks can't yet think, "Why's she in a bad mood today?" - but she can start to register a face that isn't the usual one smiling and waiting for her to smile back. It gives her more experience of the ordinary range of emotions and requires her to develop the resources to cope. This is, of course, quite different from 'teasing' her or even training her, by making her wait unnecessarily.



From parents...

"My parents split up when I was two. I know what a shadow early experiences can cast, so I can get a bit overwhelmed by the responsibility of parenting. But then I worry about a friend who seems to have given up on herself and only invests in her children. I worry they will grow up with the burden of being completely responsible for her happiness."

From theory and practice...

Winnicott (the paediatrician and psychoanalyst) spent a lot of time in the company of mothers and their babies. He observed that babies and children who had been too well attuned to, who never experienced a gap between what they wished for and what the world could provide, were not properly prepared for the world. Hopkins, a child psychotherapist, (1996) developed his ideas in a paper called "The dangers and deprivations of too-good mothering". She argues that if a baby never has the need to cry out in frustration she has been deprived of the opportunity to learn that she can express herself effectively and elicit a response. This will hamper the development of a sense of agency and the capacity to negotiate. It inhibits the development of the capacity for concern and the wish to make reparation. In short, too-good mothering produces children in a state of arrested development.

So what does make a good (enough) parent?

If you were well-enough parented yourself, it's probably all fairly easy: you have memories inside yourself, conscious and unconscious, to draw on. You will not escape having mixed, even hostile feelings towards your baby but you will be able to keep them in perspective and not let that interfere with caring for and loving your baby. You can manage, often enough, to respond to your baby when she needs it, just as your parents responded to you. You will be able to give your baby the space to be more separate when she needs it. Importantly, you will be able to forgive yourself when you make mistakes. You have a basic feeling of "I know how to do this, well enough." Indeed, as Hopkins (1996) suggests, sometimes a mother or father may feel they had 'too much' good parenting. They feel rather stifled and need to get away from the influence of it. Trying to be different from your own parents may be essential for you to feel like an individual now, but it may leave you rather at sea on

how to go about it. If you had unhappy experiences then you may have more to fear from becoming like your own parents.

From parents...

"In the early weeks there were nights when she would just cry and cry in my arms and I couldn't make it better for her. It was so hard to bear and yet I knew that I could bear it. I planted my feet to the floor in the darkness of our bedroom and swayed, singing lullabies. My mind was shattered but deep inside I felt solid"

"Parenting doesn't come from the intellectual self, where the bright light of reason shines, it emerges from a dark forgotten place and is full of surprises, some good and some bad."

"I was smacked a lot as a child and I worry that I will find myself smacking my children."

"When I hear myself say these things I think I've become my mother."

"I think my mother was bullied by her father when he returned a 'changed man' after the war and then she, in turn, bullied me as a teenager. At times I fear I will repeat the pattern. I was worried that I would be a very bad mother. My husband and I have discussed it and if I begin to sound like her when talking to our daughter he tells me. He knows I don't want to do it."

"Sometimes I hear in my tone of voice some attitude that is not mine, it is from my mother but I rejected all of that, decided I wasn't going to be like that. So where the hell does it creep out from?"

If your memories are unhappy then remembering your childhood will be painful, but it does seem that telling someone else about your past can really help you to avoid patterns being repeated.

Organising a routine

Mothers vary in whether they like a routine or not. You may want to get the baby into a routine of say three-hourly feeds. This might make you feel more comfortable because you can keep tabs on what is going on, be sure that the baby is feeding

enough. You might feel it is worth making an effort to keep the home tidy, and that this tidiness will help you keep your doubts about being a good parent under control.

Or it may be the opposite. You want at first just to be there for your baby, and feed him at any time he feels like it. You will probably be rather untidy, perhaps not making it out of your dressing-gown very often. Your way of coping is to take your lead from your baby, and follow his cues.

Both these ways of starting out with a baby have something to offer - but an extreme version of either can lead to difficulties. If it means too much to you to be in control, then you may feel it is a battle between you and the baby if he cries to be fed when the clock says it's too soon. You may feel you have to "train" him to wait. Perhaps this is the wrong battle at the wrong time and the priority should be responding to your baby's cues while he is still very little. Later he will be able to accommodate himself to your timetable. Similarly if tidiness in the home, or getting yourself carefully dressed with your make-up on, is imperative, perhaps the surface look of things has got rather out-of-hand. Are you trying to protect yourself and the baby from the emotional messiness that usually ensues when two human beings get really close?

On the other hand, while a baby does need to be attended to, the extreme of too much wallowing in being an "earth mother" can ignore the fact that some settling into a timetable and sorting out day from night can also help him learn about structure. Untidiness can in the first place be a sign of spontaneity. Too much can be a sign of depression, or indeed lead to depression.

Fathers may have a difficult time sorting out what all this means. Should you be more worried if you find a tidy home and immaculate partner, or a disorganised home and a dishevelled partner? Probably a balance of these is the happiest state to be in. Either way, it takes time to gain confidence in how to be a parent. The more that you handle the baby the more "positive" and "negative" feed-backs you will get, that is to say the more you will learn about what your baby needs. Allowing yourselves at first to get into the baby's rhythm, sleeping when he does can be the most restful way to start. It is important that fathers do this finding out directly for yourselves rather than just taking instruction. Chapters 8 and 9 will look at how to negotiate with the baby, to get into more predictable routines of feeding and sleeping.

Coping with the Baby Blues and Postnatal Depression

Having a baby is supposed to be a joyful occasion. How do you cope if that's not how you feel? If you are miserable, or perhaps even worse, have a sort of numb flatness.

Baby blues

About 50 percent of women suffer from "baby blues". They feel exhausted, disillusioned, even angry. Soon after the birth, there may be a couple of days of crying, feeling low and anxious and being unable to sleep. It might be quite an understandable reaction to all the anticipation and excitement of the birth, the anti-climax after 9 months of waiting and the shock of actually having to deal with a baby who is also having to get used to the world outside the womb. So after the first three or four days, this feeling of "the blues" sets in, and usually lasts only a day or so. Some women may recognise it as just part of all the heightened emotions in a home with a new baby; but it can be very upsetting.

Post-natal depression

Postnatal depression is different; after a few days of obvious "blues" it can be a more subtle condition, not always easy to detect, and it goes on for much longer. If you are suffering from it you may just think of yourself as being tired; and giving birth and looking after a small baby is certainly tiring. It can feel as though nothing is right, you are disappointed in yourself and your baby. This can set in after a few weeks of things feeling alright, then you find yourself thinking: "Is this all there is?" Anxiety that you aren't looking after the baby well enough, or guilt, might keep troubling you and perhaps anger and a feeling that nobody is being any help to you.

Causes of postnatal depression

In fact post-natal depression is a sort of emotional loneliness. There are no direct causes, any more than in depression generally, but there are factors that make mothers more vulnerable. The simple fact of having a baby can trigger depression in someone who is vulnerable. Leach describes it well: "Once the brief drama of delivery is over and the baby declared healthy, most of the care and concern that has surrounded her will melt away, leaving her with her old life and identity in an

unravelling tangle in the baby's innocent fists and no clear-cut way of reknitting it to accommodate them both. No wonder a sense of anxious anticlimax is common and depression far from rare." Post-natal depression can interfere with bonding but trying to care for a baby you have not bonded with is also depressing. The relentlessness of her demands can feel too much and guilt about resenting the baby may compound the depression.

Parents' parents

Support from grandparents at this time can make a big difference to a new family. If this is missing and your parents, and perhaps especially your mother, is not around, you may find that you go on and on thinking about her, perhaps angrily, perhaps with sadness. If she has died you are especially likely to miss her love and care for you and your baby. There does seem to be something special about the confirmation from your own mother, that you are now a mother yourself. It is sad to have to do without this. Brown and Harris (1978) suggest it may be hardest if your mother died before you were aged 11. This age is significant because it is before or about the time of puberty. It means that you did not have your mother's actual knowledge of your body, and yourself becoming a woman, and the pleasure of showing her how you were growing up. Having a loss like this is not an immediate cause of pnd but it may mean you are vulnerable to it. It is really important to think about and remember your mother, look at any photographs you have of her, perhaps see a likeness to her in your baby. If you had a happy childhood with her the memories of this might still be able to nourish you and make you feel that you can pass her mothering on to your baby.

If you had a bad relationship with your mother, whether or not she is alive now, and if you feel you weren't given enough love and care as a baby, it can be really hard to feel you have enough resources inside yourself now to give to your own baby. People who can remember a difficult childhood are more strongly placed to get over it and make a fresh start with their baby than those who have suppressed the memory.

You might think that mothers know what to do instinctively. It is true that as children they were probably playing at putting their dolls to bed and imagining themselves in the role of mother, while you were playing with Action Man, but parenting doesn't

necessarily come easier to either one of you. The more contact and experience you get, the more confident you will feel and the more you will get to know and love your baby. Studies show that fathers experience the same physiological response to a baby's crying as mothers do. It is nearness to a baby that releases knowledge of what to do. A baby's cry is itself instinctively driven, and so is the response. The sound of the cry tells us that they are in need and that we must stay near to work it out. Mothers can quickly become experts in this because, especially if they are breastfeeding, they are often already nearby. If as a father you also interact with your child, regularly changing his nappies, picking him up if he cries, you will have an equal chance to understand the baby's needs. You may worry about being too big and too rough for this tiny creature. If so the best thing you can do is try holding him anyway. You will pick up from his signals information about how he likes to be held.

About the Writers

Dilys Daws

Dilys Daws is a child psychotherapist with a special interest in working with infants and their parents, and in making psychoanalytic ideas more accessible. She has worked for much of her career at the Tavistock Clinic, and at the Baby Clinic of the James Wigg Practice in Kentish Town. her publications include *Through the Night: Helping Parents and Sleepless Infants*, which has helped professionals and parents understand the causes of babies sleep problems. She has taught and lectured widely in this country and abroad, and campaigns for more infant mental health services. *Finding Your way With Your Baby* is her first publication written mainly for parents.



Alexandra de Rementeria

I met Dilys while doing my pre-clinical masters. I became pregnant with my first child in the last year and Dilys noted that I had recently read all the latest research on babies, was about to find out a few things for myself, and would have access to other new mums. My children are both at school now and I am three years into my doctoral training as a child and adolescent psychotherapist at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust. My background is in Early Years teaching.

