



Using ACT to support women in the transition to motherhood

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Let me tell you a story...



Let your child into your heart?
Or lock the monsters out?



The challenge of maternity

- One in seven couples experience infertility.
- One in four confirmed pregnancies end in loss.
- One in four women report a difficult childbirth.
- One in five women who begin breastfeeding stop in under four months. Two in three will stop in under a year.
- One in seven mothers develop postnatal depression.
- One in ten mothers develop postnatal anxiety.

Pressure, confusion and controversy

A bottle of formula at night helps baby to sleep for longer

Follow your baby's cues

Routine is important

Don't let baby fall asleep after a feed

Breast is best

Feed on demand

Teach baby to self-settle

Put baby to bed sleepy but awake

Don't create sleep associations

Give baby a dummy to protect against SIDS

Sleep begets sleep

Feeding to sleep is normal

Night waking is normal in babies

Cry it out is harmful

Don't use a dummy

Sleep baby in the same room

Over-tired babies find it harder to get to sleep

Bed-sharing is dangerous



Complex, interconnected system + disciplinary lens = confusion and controversy




The two dominant worldviews

<p>Behavioural</p> <p>Operant theory, applied behaviour analysis, social learning theory</p>	<p>Relational/emotional</p> <p>Attachment theory, emotional availability, meta-emotion theory</p>
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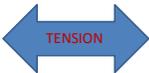
In fact, the evolutionary paradigm holds it all...

Evolutionary Paradigm

Contextual Behavioural Science (including Operant Theory)

Attachment Theory

Unexamined assumptions Errors in application of theory



Unexamined assumptions Errors in application of theory

Parental sensitivity is when caregiving is under the contextual control of the baby's cues (i.e. baby's cues are antecedents) and has a reinforcing function

Attachment behaviour is any behaviour with the FUNCTION of obtaining proximity to and nurturance from caregivers





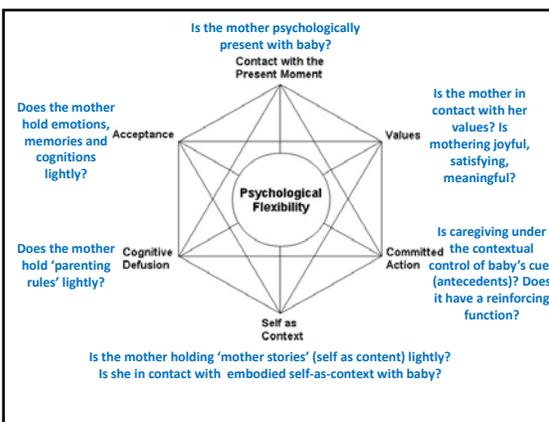
Parental responsiveness is nature's dose-control system

Parental responsiveness allows the child to control his or her own 'stimulation dose', keeping stimulation in the 'just right' zone for learning and development.



How does ACT support this?

- Parental psychological presence
- Baby following and joy following NOT rule following
- Experiential acceptance (empathy/compassion hurts)
- Psychological flexibility and gentle experimentation



The problem with excessive rule-following

In a nutshell: loss of sensitivity to context

- Pliance = rule following is under the control of the socially mediated consequences specified in the rule.
 - Problem: If you are focussed on following the 'good mother' rules and/or winning the approval of others then you are less likely to notice what's actually working for you with your baby
- Tracks = rules that describe naturally occurring consequences of the world
 - Problem: tracks may be false, unworkable or even untestable

Be aware...

- Sometimes people will call pliance 'values'
 - My values? well I want to be a 'good mum' and here's all the rules I've been told to follow to get a 'good mum' star...
- Just because you are clear on your values and trying to live them doesn't mean you are invulnerable to false tracks
 - I need to wean my baby because that's consistent with my value of encouraging my child to be independent...

"Pain is a gift. Without the capacity for pain we can't feel the hurt we inflict."

-the 12th Doctor



WARNING

My nightmare: ACT gone horribly wrong

Mum mindfully, and with acceptance of her own distress, ignores her baby's cues and her own gut feelings, in the service of pliance that she mistakenly calls 'values'



Keep ACT right

- Keep values at the centre
- Don't be fooled by rules or cultural norms
- Get values right by looking for **joy**
- Acceptance and mindfulness are not ends unto themselves
- Infuse ACT with compassion
- Gut feelings are valuable
- Remember **WORKABILITY**, that is, gentle and flexible **EXPERIMENTATION** – what does your experience tell you?

How does the story end?



Let's play!



Brene Brown on Empathy



ACT done little and gentle

- Be psychologically present yourself
- Speak with wholehearted acceptance
- Hold thoughts lightly
- Hold gently and with compassion the pain of your client as well as your own
- Notice and resist the temptation to 'fix' or compare
- Notice and resist the temptation to find the 'silver lining' or the 'bright side'

*You cannot fix grief.
There are no 'right' words.
There are only compassionate words.*

ACT done little and gentle



Parenting values



***Don't parent to 'the problem'
Parent from your values...***



Interpersonal mindfulness and acceptance



The three pillars of the Possums Sleep intervention

Empowerment

The facts about sleep

Action



possums
for children and families



Our values, just like a guiding star, can guide us through stormy seas. There is a dignity and strength in choosing to face something painful, difficult or frightening in the service of something important to us.

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