

Babies who want to be touched the least, often need it the most

By Lorika de Jager

When little Saige came for her very first BabyGym class at three months, she was not a very happy baby. The moment they came in the door, she started crying. Mommy had to stand with her in her arms throughout the entire session. She obviously did not get much massaging done. Stimbile, Saige's nanny, came along to the classes and also practised the massaging techniques.

As we walked out after the massaging class, mom Alida opened her heart and raised her concerns. She was very worried about Saige's behaviour as there were similarities between her reactions and early signs of Autism. Mom recalled that her little

girl was fine at home in her own environment, but the moment they left their home, she would start screaming. She also did not like it at all when someone tried to touch her. She would start crying uncontrollably when touched, almost like the person touching her was causing her pain. During the conversation, Mom mentioned that the birthing process was difficult. Saige was born with three broken ribs and a torn ligament in her right arm. This hindered movement of her arm and the muscle movement was jerky.



During our conversation I could identify that Saige's behaviour was most likely indicating that her skin was perceiving touch as threatening, because there was a history of pain. Every time she was picked up, the fractured rib was painful, so being held and touched was often accompanied by pain. As a result, the skin's protective function determined that she pull away or withdraw from touch, even after the initial painful areas had healed.

That same evening Alida massaged Saige at home and the next morning I got a message that Saige finished her 120 ml bottle in one feed for the first time. They normally had to go back a few times to get her to finish her bottle. She also slept very well that night, for the first time in three months. As her BabyGym Instructor, I spoke to Dr Melodie de Jager, who gave some more wonderful ideas to help Saige to relax and also gave guidance about massaging and developing the right arm and shoulder. Alida and Stimbile was very diligent and massaged Saige religiously twice a day. Things went very well for a couple of days, but then Alida had a very busy day and did not get to massaging Saige. Again it was almost impossible to calm Saige. She cried for an hour, refused to sleep and was simply just not consolable. The next day, Alida returned to their new "normal" routine of massaging and soon Saige was sleeping peacefully.

Saige started opening her hands more often and by the third week of BabyGym, Saige was a new person. She was happily taking part in all the BabyGym class activities without crying.

Now, a year later, Saige is a strong, happy and intelligent little girl, up to any challenge and keeping her parents on their toes. The movement in her arm is perfect and she loves giving hugs!

Regular loving touch does build a better body and better brain.