

BECOMING A FAMILY UNDER UNFAMILIAR CIRCUMSTANCES – SUPPORT AND OBSTACLES IN SKIN-TO-SKIN CONTACT

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Qualitative research about parental experiences of skin-to-skin care (SSC) reveals that the provision of SSC is characterised as a restoring experience as well as an energy-draining activity. Influences from three different layers – a) family and friends, b) community and c) society at large - can be either supportive or work as obstacles for the process of becoming a family under the unfamiliar experiences leading to the need for SSC (1).

Aim: The aim of this presentation is to propose actions to avoiding obstacles and providing support for SSC between parents and their newborn infants, in the process of becoming a family.

Methods: From the results of a meta-study (1) including 24 qualitative papers from 7 countries, a number of energy-draining experiences can be identified, related to factors that can be modified for achieving a more restoring and less energy-draining experience. In a secondary analysis these factors will be discussed and actions will be proposed to provide families with better support for SSC.

Results: Actions to support parents under skin-to-skin care should focus on the following factors: A) The physical environment of the neonatal unit should provide space and privacy for families and reduce noise and “technology-stress” levels. B) Staff should encourage and support parents to provide skin-to-skin care, without inflicting pressure or feelings of guilt. C) Fathers need extra support to be confident in providing SSC. D) The needs of the whole family, including siblings at home, should be taken into account. By taking these actions, SSC can lead to increased self-esteem and finding of the role as a parent.

Conclusion: Skin-to-skin care can be a restoring experience but health-care and society needs to support the process of becoming a family under unfamiliar circumstances.

1. Anderzén-Carlsson A, Lamy Z, Tingvall M, Eriksson M. Parental Experiences of Skin-to-Skin Care: a Meta-Study. Submitted.

