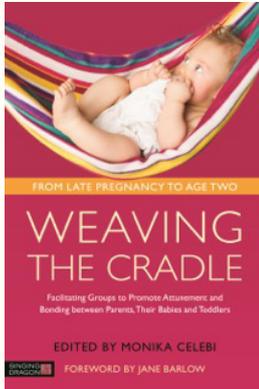


# Weaving the Cradle

**Edited by Monika Celebi, this book describes best practice in facilitating antenatal and parent-baby groups. Leading experts share their work and parents' voices enrich the themes woven through the chapters.**

This is an excerpt from Section 2, Chapter 7, A Friendly Mirror: Combining Watch Wait and Wonder with Video Interaction Guidance in Baby Watching Groups. The incident described in the first paragraph was video-recorded and discussed the following week by the parents in the group.



## MANAGING THE PRESENT MOMENT

Parent and baby groups are never static, but in constant flux, as babies' needs are urgent, and their interests uninhibited. The parents' task is always to manage their babies and regulate their excitement, to respond appropriately to the constantly changing rhythms and flow of the unexpected; how much space to give, and when to intervene, verbally or non-verbally, was an ongoing dilemma, and a common theme. Rosa was just learning to balance. She crawled towards the door of the room and pulled herself up with great concentration. Des, who was the same age, but much bigger, approached her. He also wanted to stand up, and he used Rosa to support himself. There was a moment when both were balancing precariously, then they started to sway and eventually toppled over. All the adults in the group were watching, and exclaimed as one when the pair fell. Quickly both toddlers crawled back to their mummies, not sure if they should be upset, and the parents managed to reassure them. Anna then talked proudly about how Rosa had just learned to stand up, and Des's mother said she was concerned he may hurt Rosa. I commented on the excitement that had gripped us all.

## REFLECTION

When we watched this the following week, Anna said how amazed she was, as in her memory the event seemed much longer. This was an interesting comment, as it showed how when we are totally focused, our perception of time changes. Ultimately I want to support parents to learn to be present and attentive in the moment, rather than be preoccupied with past or future events. I find that when parents become more trusting of themselves and their babies, they are able to relax and experience what can also be described as 'flow', 'when you are so completely absorbed by an activity that nothing else seems to matter' (Buchanan & Csikszentmihalyi 1991).

## LEARNING FROM SEEING MYSELF

One clip showed baby Ezra marveling with excitement at his reflection in a shiny disc. I exchanged a delighted glance with his mother. Her smile grew. Within a fraction of a second my expression changed as I noticed that baby Helen started to grumble. Then I looked at my co-

facilitator, and back to baby Helen's mother, who eventually picked Helen up to comfort her. All these expressions took place in a very short time. I realized then how much my face works, as I relate to all babies and adults in the room, my attention shifting – alert to the many communications and feelings in the group. Equally, even though I am quite tall, I noticed that I grow and shrink in response to whom I am communicating with. This would also affect where and how I positioned myself in the circle, and whom I chose to sit next to. Ilana, aged 23, had been abandoned by her family to traffickers. She managed to escape, and was lucky to receive housing and support in this country. She was very loving to Katarina, her 11-month-old toddler, but extremely protective and tended to restrict her movements. Equally she was insistent that Katarina 'does not like groups'. I made a conscious effort to sit next to her, as I felt my physical proximity did benefit this dyad. It was the little shifts of posture and my admiring gaze that I think contributed to helping Ilana feel safe, so that after a few sessions she could exclaim, 'Look at Katarina, she learned to walk last week, did you film that?' In supervision we reflected on how the facilitator functions like a conductor. By moving my attention and attuning with my body, with vocalization and with words, I help to contain and to make sense of constantly shifting events. Using embodied mentalization and receiving babies and parents at great speed is at the heart of this process (Shai & Belsky 2011).

## FRIENDLY MIRROR

Baby Watching groups involve many possible combinations of mirroring, between parent and baby, baby and other adults, baby and other babies, parents and other parents, and all with the facilitators (Celebi 2014; James 2016). This experience is amplified by better than usual visual images I show parents. Seeing themselves at moments of attunement gives parents a sense of an alternative hopeful narrative, which paradoxically often frees them to talk about challenges. The benign comments from others help parents to internalize more positive aspects of themselves, and this gives them courage and confidence (Celebi 2014).