

Fourth Trimester Podcast

Episode 99: The Power of Touch in Supporting Infant Development

Sarah Trott: [00:00:05] My name is Sarah Trott. I'm a new mama to a baby girl and this podcast is all about postpartum care for the few months following birth, the time period also known as the Fourth Trimester. My postpartum doula, Esther Gallagher, is my co-host. She's a mother, grandmother, perinatal educator, birth and postpartum care provider. I've benefited hugely from her support. All parents can benefit from the wisdom and support that a postpartum Doula provides. Fourth trimester care is about the practical, emotional and social support parents and baby require, and importantly, helps set the tone for the lifelong journey of parenting.

When I first became pregnant, I had never heard of postpartum Doulas, let alone knew what they did. So much of the training and preparation that expecting parents do is focused on the birth and newborn care. Once a baby is born, often the first interaction parents have with medical or child professionals, other than the first pediatrician visits, is the six-week checkup with the OB/GYN. *What about caring for mama and family between the birth and the six week doctor visit? What are the strategies for taking care of the partner and the rest of the family while looking after your newborn?*

Our podcasts contain expert interviews with specialists from many fields to cover topics including postpartum doula practices, prenatal care, prenatal and postnatal yoga, parenting, breastfeeding, physical recovery from birth, nutrition, newborn care, midwifery, negotiating family visitation, and many more.

First-hand experience is shared through lots of stories from both new and seasoned parents. Hear what other parents are asking and what they have done in their own lives.

We reference other podcasts, internet resources and real-life experts who can help you on your own parenting journey. Visit us at <http://fourthtrimesterpodcast.com>

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Sarah Trott: [00:00:44] Hi, this is Sarah Trott and welcome back to the Fourth Trimester Podcast. I'm here with a special guest, Kari Marble, who is a dear friend of mine and also someone who I've practiced with directly, so I'm excited to have her here on the program today.

Sarah Trott: [00:01:00] Before I introduce her, I would like to remind everyone that we have a website which is fourthtrimesterpodcast.com. Please go and sign up for our newsletter so you can hear every time we release a new episode. You can follow us on Apple iTunes or wherever you listen to your podcasts regularly.

Sarah Trott: [00:01:16] So today's topic is the power of touch in supporting infant development. And this is a fantastic topic where we are going to talk about attachment, how touch influences brain development, how we can set baby up for a life of stability and healthy development.

Sarah Trott: [00:01:37] And so with me today, as I mentioned, we have Kari Marble and I'll just introduce her now. So she has spent the last 20 plus years of her career in the healing arts, she's a certified yoga instructor and she does meditation leadership. She's a massage therapist, including craniosacral, Reiki and infant massage. She leads birth education courses and women's retreats, and she is really focused on women's health and the childbearing year in particular.

Sarah Trott: [00:02:12] And on a personal note, what I really love about Kari is that she weaves connection and transformation into all of her practices. My relationship to Kari firsthand is that I have taken her prenatal yoga program through the hospital where I gave birth here in San Francisco. So we have that special connection. I'm really thrilled that she agreed to be on the program today, and she has a lifetime of work and inspiration that comes out of her own journey as a mother, and she has two children of her own. So I want to just wholeheartedly welcome you, Kari Marble, to the program. Thanks for coming.

Kari Marble: [00:02:49] Thank you so much, Sarah. I'm so happy to be here. And I just want to express appreciation for this beautiful work that you're doing in support of

mamas and families. Over the years, I have really seen how when mamas feel well-resourced, loved, nurtured, provided with tools and support for all that they might need, and they learn to take care of themselves and give themselves self-love and compassion as well, they can rise to take on the hard stuff, really, whether that is a physical discomfort of what happens to the body with hours of holding and feeding babies, to the emotional challenge of relationship shift with parenthood to just overall motherhood experience. So thank you for your contribution.

Kari Marble: [00:03:36] And for years now, I've recommended instead of scrolling through phone or tablet while feeding, that mamas listen to this podcast instead so they can hold baby's gaze and be in connection and still be receiving information and nourishing support. So thank you.

Sarah Trott: [00:03:52] I love that. Thank you so much. We have settled on a topic of infant touch and development, and you have been teaching infant development and massage courses for quite some time. Do you want to talk a little bit about that part of your journey?

Kari Marble: [00:04:09] Sure. Well, I've loved touch since I was a little girl. I have memories of being, you know, maybe six, seven years old and my father scratching my back and just saying, scratch it, just enjoying the contact with a parent of that nurturing touch. I can remember the feeling of my mother's hand on my brow, calming me for sleep or massaging my head. I can remember my grandmother's touch that way also, so it's very much in my body, that kind of loving touch and how that travels through us on through the generations, how we're touching our children too. And I've always loved massage.

Kari Marble: [00:04:47] I did other work professionally for ten years before starting to do massage therapy, yoga, and birth education, but it was very, very natural for me to learn to support people in having a healthier relationship with their bodies through touch and a deep healing relationship, through connecting with the body and coming out of our culture's overemphasis on just living in the head and the mind.

Kari Marble: [00:05:12] And so when I had a baby and began to expand all my offerings, it was very natural that I would start to share this with other parents, too. And I took a class when my daughter was just four weeks old to learn how to massage her and just remember thinking, this is wonderful, I want to do this, I want to share this. And then I took the training to become certified when my second child, my son, was just four months old and that was over 20 years ago now.

Kari Marble: [00:05:39] So I've been sharing infant massage with families for 20 years, and because it's been this long, I've really gotten to see a lot. I've stayed in touch with many families and really been able to witness how it supports connection, attachment and bonding and how it continues to develop as children grow older right through teen years even.

Sarah Trott: [00:06:00] Yeah, and you're speaking to the topic of attachment. There's this connection that happens early in life and that carries through a lifetime.

Kari Marble: [00:06:10] In so many important ways, so many. So, what is attachment? Attachment is a powerful and as you said, a lasting bond that forms over time between parent and child. But parents are the ones initiating. Infants are reliant on their parents to cultivate an attachment to them initially at least. And attachment is really seen as the cornerstone of infant development. And why? Because it's really the foundation of a child's health in so many ways. It forms the foundation for how they learn to cope with life and stresses, how they develop a sense of self-esteem, how they build and engage in relationships beyond the initial parental relationship really throughout life, even how the personality develops. So attachment is the foundation of all of that.

Kari Marble: [00:07:05] And that's because when the beloved caregiver (and I might default to saying mama, but I also mean father, co-parent, loving caregiver, really of any kind. So I'm just going to say mama refers to all of those loving beings.).

Kari Marble: [00:07:21] So when a mama is paying close attention to her baby, which is part of what builds attachment, she is learning to follow baby's cues and just becoming curious, watching baby, seeing how baby's responses unfold to different interactions.

She's showing that she cares and that baby is receiving the message I am worthy of this attention. I'm worthy of this focus. I'm worthy of being recognized. And that forms the basis of self-esteem and how that child will come to form trusting, secure attachments with others in that child's life as well.

Kari Marble: [00:07:58] And a sense of secure attachment allows a baby to just relax into all the demands of growth. Right? Growth takes so much energy in those in the early months and years, and the brain is developing at its fastest rate in our whole human lifetime, from third trimester pregnancy through age two. So it's the most rapid growth. And what's developing there is about 70% of the final DNA content of the cerebral cortex. The neural tissue lining of the cerebrum develops after birth.

Kari Marble: [00:08:35] So what that means is the environment and interactions have a huge impact on that growing baby, on that growing baby's brain. And what functions are developing then are things like language, attention, memory, creativity, imagination, thought awareness, perception and nervous system regulation and emotional regulation. These are big. And so if a child feels safe and loved, which comes greatly about through that safe, nurturing touch and connection and attuning to baby through that curiosity and observing, then baby can devote all those energy resources needed to brain growth. All it takes for that optimal unfolding is healthy interpersonal interaction opportunities.

Kari Marble: [00:09:26] Basically, if a baby instead is feeling stressed, disconnected, not having that secure attachment, then so much of that energy has to go to recovering from stress and re-finding equilibrium. And so when babies have chronic stress, even if they weren't wired at birth, to lean toward being a stressed individual, being in chronic stress, there's an expression with infants, "states can become traits", and so it can create a high stress situation, can become a personality trait that wasn't necessarily there at birth.

Kari Marble: [00:10:04] And so then we really just want to help babies have healthy attachment circumstances and try to remove stress from their lives to the extent we can, and then just give them love and all the optimal unfolding can take place.

Sarah Trott: [00:10:19] And babies don't have language when they're born. Their love language might be touch and closeness. They can understand sound and they can certainly understand emotion, the emotion in the room. They're highly attuned to feelings and sound even in the womb. We know this. And so coming out on the other side where they're in our arms, understanding the importance of touch is so crucial. And I was curious, is this actually going to alter other things as well. Like how far does this go? Is it potentially genetic even?

Kari Marble: [00:10:54] Well, so first, in response to a couple of things, you said, yes, babies are birthed right into being wired for connection and attachment. Unless there's been a particular situation like drug exposure or other kind of high risk situations that may have impacted baby's natural development right at birth, they are really right there and ready for touch and ready for connection.

Kari Marble: [00:11:20] And people often ask, well, 'how is my baby already able to receive massage so early?' But they're getting massaged in the womb all the time. So every time a pregnant person is breathing, that exhale little hug of the abdominals against the womb is creating a watery massage against baby. And as the womb grows, the colon is expanded, kind of pushed out of the way to each side, above and around. So peristaltic action, digestive movement through the colon is also creating this kind of massage in the womb.

Kari Marble: [00:11:53] So babies are having a warm, watery, nice massage on a regular basis, so they often are ready to receive touch right away. Though some babies are extra sensitive and you need to go a lot slower with helping that baby feel safe with touch.

Kari Marble: [00:12:09] So no, nothing applies across the board exactly to every baby. You always want to tune in to how that baby's doing and at any particular moment of the day as well.

Kari Marble: [00:12:19] Touch is baby's first language. It really is their first language, and it's the most important language for their brain development for quite some time. It's really how they take in information about the world and have a sense of experience and curiosity and growth, and even feeling that this world is safe is a safe place to be. And long before the verbal expression comes, there are so many ways they can communicate. So through touching, through affection, through eye expression, through their coos and their sounds, happy or not happy, there are many, many nonverbal cues that babies give, and spending time attuning to them and touching them gives us opportunity to watch and listen and get to know what those cues are uniquely for our child.

Kari Marble: [00:13:12] So your question was about genetics. It's a fascinating field, epigenetics. So this is not an area of my expertise. But I just follow enough to be fascinated and in awe of what continues to be learned. And something we understand is that we may be born with a genetic predisposition for a certain kind of expression, and then that can be turned on and lit up or not by our environment. So mother rats, for example, licking their babies extensively - those babies have lower stress cortisol, lower stress, neurotransmitters.

Kari Marble: [00:13:50] We've also done research with touch with babies. There's one place called The Touch Research Institute, led by Tiffany Field. For many years they've done a lot of wonderful research on this. Other organizations have as well, that babies who receive massage on a regular basis have lower cortisol levels and lower stress neurotransmitters. Among other wonderful benefits we can get into.

Kari Marble: [00:14:17] But just that, when you look at the question of how far out it goes, well, if we can help infants be less stressed, learn how to process and release that stress or metabolize it through their bodies, then that less stressed infant can grow into a less stressed toddler, less stressed child, less stressed adult, and that less stressed, securely attached human is likely to have more positive interactions and more securely attached healthy relationships with others.

Kari Marble: [00:14:45] So a well loved, securely attached, lovingly, appropriately attached child that all ripples out into all the relationships that that person ever has. So I'd say yes, absolutely. It ripples out. And also there's been research showing that babies that were born into severe adverse situations where it could have been expected that they would have severe deficit in that optimal brain growth because of the high stress, acute and chronic circumstances, that if there's intervention of regular, loving, appropriate touch through massage, that that can be reversed. So humans are very resilient and that propensity can be changed, can be rewired.

Sarah Trott: [00:15:35] Wow. Just through the power of touch, despite the adversity of the environment, massage can have a long lasting positive effect on the child.

Kari Marble: [00:15:44] Yes. And to be really clear, appropriate, safe, nurturing touch. And that means we're never doing this to a child, to a baby. We're doing it with them. So they're not an object. We're not doing this to be a good parent or because we know it's good for them. We're always doing it with them. And that means we'll always ask permission. We'll say, 'may I give you a massage?. Would you like a massage today or may I do some yoga with you?'

Kari Marble: [00:16:09] And long before they can say yes, we can learn how to read those cues. So even with little ones, We don't get so many clear "Yes" cues say the first six weeks, but we see clear "No" cues or an absence of a "No" cue. So "No" cues might be furrowing of the brow, pouting of the lips, breaking of eye contact, tensing of the body, arching of the body. Thrusting out an arm. Active, frustrated kind of feeling. Kicking of the arms or the legs. Sounds which might be grunting. Frustrated sounds. Crying.

Kari Marble: [00:16:46] So if there's any of that, those would be "No", because we would not proceed with the touch because it's not being welcomed and it will not relieve stress. It can most definitely add to it. If we say, would you like a massage? Or we're already into it and our baby starts giving any of those "No" cues, and we continue, what we're saying, maybe unintentionally, is my agenda is more important than your getting to have a say and set a boundary, and that's not the message we want to give.

Kari Marble: [00:17:16] So it's always more important to stop and listen and let the baby feel heard, seen and recognized. And what we understand is when infants feel recognized, they can relax. And when they can relax, they make relaxation hormones. Brain development activates all of that. So baby, feeling safe, comfortable and seen is far more important than massage technique or making sure we did the right leg because we did the left.

Kari Marble: [00:17:45] And it's nice to help them feel balanced. But I'd say stroke technique is like, 20% of the experience. And I always teach what purpose each stroke has. It's good to know. We need to know, for example, that we're going to work clockwise on the belly so that we're moving gas and fecal matter in the out direction and not backing baby up. So there's some guidelines. But most important is watching baby. Is this pace feeling comfortable. Is the lighting too bright. Is it comfortable. What are the conditions that help baby be best able to relax? So are they positioned comfortably? Is it warm? Are they not over tired?

Kari Marble: [00:18:24] It's not a time to do it when they're already having an evening witching hour meltdown, they're not going to be able to receive. So learning how to attune, asking permission. So those would be some of the "No" cues.

Kari Marble: [00:18:36] And then "Yes" cues might be smiling eye contact and laughing. Nothing better than a baby's giggle once they get to that place. More relaxed. Body. Body might be active though, but if they have eye contact and they're moving around, that's called active alert. As long as they're feeling receptive overall, that would be a "Yes". They may not last as long because all that activity, which is called myelination, is stimulating them already to a degree. Happy sounds, coos, babbling. More relaxed facial expressions. So we look for those yes and no cues. So we want to offer this for all these benefits, but not at the expense of that secure attachment and baby's feeling comfortable and safe.

Kari Marble: [00:19:21] And there'd be one big exception, which is if baby's crying and we're pretty sure it's tummy distress, then we might do a special protocol for the tummy

for relief. But we'd talk baby through that, and we wouldn't sneak in the rest of the body, because then they might build a negative association to touch and not feel seen or recognized.

Sarah Trott: [00:19:41] I mean, it's respect. We're respecting this little human. We're respecting them the way we would respect ourselves or our partners or our best friends or our parents. And we're doing our job as parents by letting them know that they matter and that they can have boundaries and they can have self respect. And we're demonstrating that through our example every day and everything we do.

Kari Marble: [00:20:02] Yes, yes, yes, we're teaching them respect and trust. So they're learning to feel that they can trust us as parent or caregiver, and they can trust themselves to know how they feel and give and be emotionally honest.

Kari Marble: [00:20:19] Babies are so emotionally honest until society or you know, their experiences teaches them that that's uncomfortable and people don't like it. They start so emotionally honest.

Sarah Trott: [00:20:32] And what a gift. We actually had a really brilliant conversation with Melissa Belger, who was on the show recently about the topic of self-trust as a parent and how important it is for us to trust ourselves so that we can demonstrate that. And if we're just following steps one, two, three in a book or whatever lesson we've learned, and we're ignoring our intuition and we're ignoring the connection, then we're potentially doing more damage than good.

Kari Marble: [00:21:02] Yes. And our children are picking up everything that we are and everything that we do. So our own process of growth really does ripple right to them as well as we choose to pick up all of this stimulus for our inner work.

Kari Marble: [00:21:17] Like when our baby cries and we get so constricted and we so desperately want to stop the cry. We talk about this in infant massage workshops often because it's such an important topic, and crying often accompanies digestive distress, and it can accompany every day, depending on what's been going on that day. And

often when we're willing to pause, we might check in on why am I having such a strong response? And maybe it ties to how we were responded to or not as infants when we cried and how our needs were met? Maybe it ties to how we feel in our capability as a parent and our success as a parent.

Kari Marble: [00:21:56] Whether we can figure out so quickly how to take care of our child's discomfort. But then when we take a step back and we've checked all their basic needs and they're still crying anyway, and we might just listen and make space for, oh, okay, if I can't allow for any feeling of just discomfort in the moment of my life, how will I teach my child that if I can't allow my I don't have any room for experiencing my child's discomfort? What is that message?

And again, how are we supporting emotional safety and emotional maturation and emotional and nourishment and love? Not by just pushing something under, but really being able to be with it, to feel what's arising, make space for it and receive support and help and nourishment around it. We certainly don't need to do it all alone. Shouldn't be doing it all alone by any means.

Sarah Trott: [00:22:51] Yeah, we demonstrate that it's okay to have a wide range of emotions, positive and negative, when we're accepting and not shutting that down.

Kari Marble: [00:22:59] Yes, yes. And so while there are so many benefits to baby of infant massage, and there are many more we can talk about, there are also these benefits for parents. And so that is when we're touching our babies regularly we are watching them. And it's that attention that helps us see, oh, she always makes that expression when something seems pleasurable, or she makes this expression before the cry is coming, we start learning the cues. We become more confident in learning to read our babies, to tap that intuitive response in us, to even just check with ourselves. How does that feel?

Kari Marble: [00:23:35] Yeah, exactly what you were saying. Are these, say these one, two, three things? Wait, is that a "No" cue or "Yes" cue. Now let me just check in. What does this feel like? What's the perception I'm getting? So we have practice regularly on

learning to read our babies and respond to our babies and experiment with our response. And so we built confidence. And that kind of proximity and connection also releases wonderful hormones like oxytocin and prolactin, the love hormones that just soften all the intense, more difficult aspects of parenting. And also baby will be full of endorphins too.

Kari Marble: [00:24:17] So for baby, seeing maternal delight specifically, has been shown in research to set off a cascade of good biochemistry in the baby brain and body. So if there's that connection, baby smiles. What do you do? You smile back, of course, and they see that smile and they smile back and it just feeds.

Kari Marble: [00:24:37] And then the flip side, if baby is having a more difficult moment and we're not just going about our agenda, we pause and just rest hands. I'm here for you. Tell me all about it. Sometimes the cry changes to almost a story tone from wa to wa wa wa wa wa wa. And you might notice your child has more of a. Now I'm telling you a story because I know you're listening. And when I know you're listening, I'll communicate with you. And then I feel safe. And you're letting me get out these tears in this safe, loving space. And then I can metabolize that stress.

Kari Marble: [00:25:13] And to be clear, that's not the same as putting them in another room and leaving them alone to cry it out. That's a whole different conversation. I mean, being comfortable with being present with them as they experience that range of emotions.

Sarah Trott: [00:25:27] Yes, yes. Different conversation we have for anyone interested in sleep training or sleep methods or anything like that, since we said the phrase 'cry it out', I'm going to reference some programs we have with Doctor Angelique Millette, who is a PhD sleep consultant who is very "baby first" with friendly approaches for better sleep for families. So go check those out if you're interested in that.

Sarah Trott: [00:25:54] So I love everything you've been saying. If someone is interested in delving into the world of infant massage, where would they start? Is there an appropriate age to start with this?

Kari Marble: [00:26:05] Yes. So first, some parents choose to take an infant massage workshop while still pregnant, and that's so they can just learn. They might practice on a doll and learn the techniques and learn protocols for addressing colic or gassiness fussiness. So they're ready day one to start giving their baby a massage.

Kari Marble: [00:26:25] But I would say most most parents do take the infant massage workshops, which are often, well, the form I offer them in is a one time, two hour workshop, accompanied by a brief video that reviews all the strokes so that there's not too much pressure to get it all in that one two hour slot. Since we know very few babies just sit still for two hours without needing to feed and nap and be comforted.

Kari Marble: [00:26:49] And so, some places might also offer the class as a multi week. I used to offer four week sessions for many, many years, but I found just over time parents became a little less likely, at least here in the San Francisco Bay area to sign up for the multi-class option. So I do mostly the two hour class so you can check with wherever you are in the world. If there is a new and expectant parent resource center where you're taking classes during pregnancy, you might find they also offer infant massage classes.

Kari Marble: [00:27:23] You can also check with - if you're giving birth at a hospital or a birth center - you might also find that there are classes offered in the either multi week or one time class, and maybe you'll fall in love with it and want to do the training and share it with other parents one day too, as as I did. So that would be where to learn and then when.

Kari Marble: [00:27:45] To start with massage, you can begin really at the beginning and the key is attunement. So I gave my son a 20 minute massage the day of his birth. He just soaked it up. He just soaked it up. But I didn't do every technique. It was very calm, resting of hands, let's say on the leg. I went down the leg a few times, touched his foot, slowly, went back up his leg a few times, so slowly helping him get to know his body, get comfortable in his body.

Kari Marble: [00:28:17] Whereas a baby that's six weeks old, we might add three more different strokes in there to the leg and the foot, or even more with intention. Stimulate arch development and long downward strokes to release tension and lengthen muscles up strokes to stimulate muscle tone, and to move blood and lymph back to the heart so we can do more extensive work as babies get very comfortable with touch and are able to receive.

Kari Marble: [00:28:42] So it depends on the baby. But we can start with very simple massages from the day of birth and then proceed from there and continue on going. So when a baby is lying still and not yet rolling, it's generally the easiest time to learn because they can't roll over and crawl away. We can massage them still then, but it helps if we've started with them before they're mobile, because then they know how good it feels and it's become part of the routine already.

Kari Marble: [00:29:13] But you can absolutely learn to massage your child at any age whatsoever, and we just figure out how to do it in a way that meets the child, no matter what age. We want to figure out how to introduce touch this way that meets them where they are, and then let it evolve from there.

Kari Marble: [00:29:32] And so people can also learn privately through zoom workshops, or if they don't have something in person in their area, they could they could learn with someone like me online. And zoom works very well. We could put the camera right on, baby. We can really see closely everything that we're doing. So that's another good option too.

Sarah Trott: [00:29:52] It sounds like it's really about looking at the baby's cues and understanding those and waiting for the right moment. I've heard of people referring to the phase of quiet alert where the baby's awake, but not very, very active. They're more in observation mode. And that being a right time to sort of approach this, would you agree with that?

Kari Marble: [00:30:14] Quiet alert is the juiciest option because baby's not overstimulated at all. And what 'quiet alert' looks like is eye contact with you. Soft,

relaxed brow, relaxed body, very little activity of movement in the body. It's just this relaxed space that's totally receptive. So if you can catch that moment, it's great.

Kari Marble: [00:30:39] The next best time would be active alert. And we mentioned that that's where eye contact and engagement is there. Receptivity is there. The arms and legs might be moving around. And when that's happening the brain is setting down these neural pathways for the motor control nerves. This is how I move my arm. And every time they repetitively do that, the brain is laying down sheaths of protein called myelin around the motor control nerves. So to protect them. So that's called myelination. So if baby's in myelinating mode they'll still likely be receptive. But maybe for not as long because all that movement is already creating some stimulus.

Kari Marble: [00:31:19] And you can do a very generous massage in ten minutes. But 15 to 20 is lovely, relaxing, spacious, but a full massage can be done in ten if that works best for babies who are either very active, not yet sitting still long enough to receive more or more sensitive to touch, we would do a simpler protocol: fewer strokes, five minutes. And while you could break it up legs this time and tummy that time, chest that time, if that's what works best, that's an option. But it's lovely to do the whole thing so that there's this wonderful sense of integration for a baby. Like when we have a massage.

Kari Marble: [00:32:00] And we teach all of that in the classes, too. For example, we're not just going to go part way up the arm, we'll go all the way over the shoulder, because that gives this feeling of, oh, this arm, which for newborns, those arms are flailing around and they have no idea that flailing arm belongs to this body.

Kari Marble: [00:32:16] So maybe we can touch on infant massage benefits a little more. Would that be okay? So physically, with that example, massage is helping babies with proprioception. They're getting a sense of where they are in space by our touching them, saying this is your arm and it connects here to the rest of your body. So we're helping them feel more comfortable in their bodies, aware of where their bodies are in space. Massage of the belly is helping with the maturation of digestion and elimination.

Massage helps improve blood oxygenation and circulation. A lot of research has been done with this.

[00:32:54] For premature born babies, we're helping reduce fussiness. We're helping release stress from the muscles, which helps babies relax more and sleep more deeply, which allows for growth hormone to be released efficiently as well. So those are some of the key physical benefits.

Kari Marble: [00:33:13] And then emotionally, psychologically, spiritually. We've touched on some of the benefits of that feeling. We're letting them know you are the most important focus right here and right now. And you are worthy of this love and attention and understanding and deep attunement. So we're helping them feel safe, secure, loved, listened to, recognized, and affirmed that they can have boundaries. So as they grow, they'll learn. Okay, if I say no, that means that needs to be respected. Or if someone else says no to me, that's something I need to be respecting.

Kari Marble: [00:33:49] And then we talked about the brain development kind of maturation benefits as well. Really all of all of this connection. And for parents learning how to read baby's cues and building that confidence. We have special protocols to help with fussiness from tummy discomfort. So there are gas and colic protocols, which can be extremely helpful to move babies to another level of maturation of the system and help bring them comfort.

Kari Marble: [00:34:22] We always sing. I teach a lot of songs in my classes anyway because babies love their parents' voices, right? They've been marinating in those voices and they don't care if we sing off tune for many years to come, at least until they're about nine, then things change. So we sing a lot because it calms the parents too. And the parents are singing a slow, sweet song. They start to rock and relax and pass that relaxation on to baby. And it's very hard to think about other things when we're massaging our babies. So it brings us more into presence, which is very good for us. It helps calm and relax us through that experience. And then when we're more relaxed, that's what we're reflecting for baby. So it helps create this environment of a sigh where babies can relax more and we can relax more.

Kari Marble: [00:35:16] That's not to say that every massage will be totally zen and peaceful. Some babies get very excited by touch and so it's more of a playful thing. So some parents may choose to do massage at 6 p.m. every evening as part of bedtime ritual, and others may choose to do it other times of day more as playful interaction and not related to a going to bed routine. And we learn that with our babies too, how they respond. If they're so excited by touch, it gets them overstimulated, then we're not going to do it the last thing before we're hoping they'll settle for sleep. We'll do it a little earlier.

Kari Marble: [00:35:52] So we just learn to read their cues and pace and are watching them and being curious. So we'll go faster. We'll go slower. Does this baby show more joy if we're going a little faster and singing a more playful song? Does that baby suddenly get overstimulated? Then we learn to slow it down and adjust our pace and our flow. And so when we're starting massage, I always like to encourage parents to even take a minute, a few deep breaths to ground themselves so that they're consciously releasing accumulated tension and not passing that through to their babies. As we sit for touch. And there's a particular song I like to teach that is Bengali, which is an Indian language, in honor of this practice coming to us from India.

Kari Marble: [00:36:37] And so we'll sing and then we'll get into the rhythm of the sharing of massage. And it's a very beautiful, respectful, playful, calming or silly - depending on the time - experience to share. And it over time becomes a way to really keep sharing with our child. So I remember, for example, when my son was an age maybe 7 or 8 years old. He was at that age where I might say, how's school today? Okay. What'd you do? Nothing. What went on? Nothing. You know, and part of it is there in the moment. So they're not necessarily holding to everything. And that's the past. We're here now.

Kari Marble: [00:37:20] But what I found is when I did a back massage or a face massage at bedtime, even just through his jammies, that touch which we'd established from the first day of his life, it was such a safe space for him that that's where the stories would come out, you know? So and so didn't let me have the basketball at recess today, or that really hurt my feelings, or this happened in class, and all these stories actually

came out through the connection of the touch. And there is a long stage where I did not want to miss a bedtime, because then I'd miss that sharing. And then we were on to the next day. And so that builds over time - that bond builds the intimacy that continues to express in the unique way it's meant to for that child and that parent. That's very special.

Sarah Trott: [00:38:08] And I can't help but wonder if part of that that you developed over time had to do with touch, but also pre-language for your son. You were speaking and singing and you were sharing your voice. And so that sharing established itself very early in relationship with that appropriate touch that you were sharing. So I really appreciate that story.

Kari Marble: [00:38:31] Of course, I have to say now at age 20, he doesn't always invite me to sing, but that's just this phase, right? So we enjoy the bonding and we adjust and respectful ways for what the relationship needs to be as we move along as well.

Kari Marble: [00:38:48] And what happens too, when children have received safe, nurturing touch from early on is that helps them be more aware of their bodies as they grow. And so even with adults that I know, if an adult has a physical discomfort, not being self aware, it might just make them irritable and then take that out on their partner or their kids or their colleagues. Whereas when we have that body awareness, we can specifically think, okay, what's what's bothering me right now? Oh, my hip is really hurting. Oh, I sat in the car for ten hours driving back from that road trip yesterday and then at my desk and I'm feeling stiff and I haven't had time for my swim or my yoga. I need to take care of myself. And then we can figure out how to take care of ourselves.

Kari Marble: [00:39:35] So I found with my kids and other clients' kids too, that at a surprisingly young age, they're able to say, daddy, I have a growing pain right here. Can you massage it? Like just they can identify? Um, my son could say it at three. Mommy, my neck hurts here when I turn my head this way. Like that level of awareness is more than most of my adult massage clients have. And then as they get a little older than three, you know, with my kids, they learned how to do some stretches for themselves and some breathing practices for themselves, and they kind of knew when they needed

our help, when they needed us to massage them. Or my husband Craig's an acupuncturist. They asked for cupping sometimes, not the needles till later, but the cupping. So they came to know when to ask for help, and they came to know when there were things they could do to help reset their nervous system or relax their body, and then they could take more self responsibility.

Kari Marble: [00:40:31] You know, whether a child is maybe playing baseball at age ten and they need to be able to squat and jump, and they want some help with learning how to stretch your massage areas to be more comfortable in their bodies or whatever activity. Maybe they do a lot of art, and they learn how to ask for what they need to unwind the accumulated tension from sitting and focusing on their art in a certain way. It lets humans be more joyful in their bodies, knowing how to take care of themselves and to ask for the care that they need.

Sarah Trott: [00:41:01] Yeah, absolutely. Kari, I'd like to invite you to share something that you were sharing with me when we were chatting before we started recording, which is an exercise that you like to take parents through before they start to engage in infant massage.

Kari Marble: [00:41:18] Thank you. As I mentioned, we're often in a frenetic state. And so that we don't pass that on to our babies, I encourage at the very least three breaths of arrival. And if we have a couple more minutes, we'll go a little deeper. So if you're comfortable, however you're sitting, just take a nice tall spine. If you're sitting in a chair, scootch toward the front of the chair so your feet can be planted on the floor. If you're on the ground, maybe you could be on a folded blanket or cushion. You can lie down if you need also.

Kari Marble: [00:41:51] So relax your belly and if your nose is clear, take a slow, deep breath in through your nose all the way deep into your belly. Your Midribs your upper chest. And that exhales through the mouth and just feel the exhaust starting to leave your body. Breathing in deeply. Receive the breath, taking in oxygen and prana, vital energy. Breathe all the way down to your tailbone. Even feel yourself landing in your body. Long. Exhale through your mouth. One more time. And just notice how you feel

from those even three breaths of arrival can help us feel more present. And we'll add three more breaths. Breathing in through the nose and out through the nose.

Kari Marble: [00:42:49] Now. So as you inhale slowly, with eyes closed, let your internal gaze go up to your third eye. That's the point between your eyebrows and just a little elevated. This is the center of our intuition, our higher knowing. So your inner gaze goes up at the top of your in-breath. Hold for just a few seconds. And then as you exhale, keeping eyes closed, let the internal gaze drop down as if you're gazing toward the tip of your nose. Exhale all the way out.

Kari Marble: [00:43:22] And then pause a few seconds, getting comfortable in this space between the parts of the breath. Inhale slowly. Take the internal gaze up. This practice teaches us to focus and center, bring our attention to this moment calms our nervous system. We briefly hold. And then when you're ready, exhale, gazing back toward the tip of the nose. Let all the breath out. Pause in the quiet space between breaths. I'll do one more breathe in. And the hold unless you're pregnant. While listening to this, skip the breath holding part. Just the slow breath in and out is great. Let's exhale. Hold out.

Kari Marble: [00:44:21] And then come back to a natural breath flowing in and out. And bring your chin down toward your chest. Let's do a half neck roll, moving your chin along the right collarbone to the shoulder as you inhale. Roll back down the right collarbone to the chest as you exhale. Inhale up the left side to the shoulder. Exhale back down. And then bring the head slowly back up and roll your shoulders forward, up, back and down.

Kari Marble: [00:45:01] And then slowly open your eyes and rub your hands together and just feel the warmth that's in your hands. In Chinese medicine traditions and yoga, Ayurveda traditions say the heart meridians or heart energy flows from the heart through the arms to the palms. So when we rub our palms, it's a way of putting our heart in our hands. So that's a beautiful thing to do before touching our babies for massage or for yoga. It's also beautiful thing to do just to feel the warmth, energy and love within us as we may bring those palms together in offering just a bow of thanks to another. So thank you for sharing and allowing me to share in this way today, Sarah.

Sarah Trott: [00:45:44] Oh, thank you Kari. Thank you so much. Well, this is a perfect place for us to wrap up. I'm going to mention a few things that we have partnered up to offer to our listeners.

Sarah Trott: [00:45:57] First off, anyone who's interested in working with Kari, you have virtual meditation and breathwork courses which we can find. You can go to fourthtrimesterpodcast.com/kari and then use the code FOURTHTRIMESTER when you're booking for 20% off and she has three courses, there will be probably more to come. I'll mention, stabilize and activate brain health, de-excite the nervous system and then awaken subtle joy from within. Ananda! So definitely go check those out.

Kari Marble: [00:46:26] And then next you can book private sessions with Kari so she can work with you in person if you're in the Bay Area in California, or you can work virtually with her anywhere in the world, and she'll do infant massage workshops with you private meditation, breathwork, yoga, prenatal yoga, and she'll offer 10% off of those if you use the code FOURTHTRIMESTER.

Sarah Trott: [00:46:49] And then thirdly, I'll mention that you have your courses at CPMC Newborn Connections. Again, these are also virtual. We'll have links for all of this on the website on fourthtrimesterpodcast.com so you can find it. And you can go ahead and book and then use a code for a 20% off refund when you're booking there.

Sarah Trott: [00:47:09] And then lastly, if you're local in the Bay area, you can attend in-person courses through Natural Resources. They're an incredible shop and they have tons of courses. They have virtual dad support groups. They have all kinds of amazing stuff. But you can get a discount using the code FOURTHTRIMESTER with them as well for 15% off, specifically on the courses for infant massage that Kari teaches, as well as the preparing for Postpartum course, which, by the way, is taught by the amazing Serena Saeed Winn, who has been on our program before back on episode 86 most recently. And she's brilliant. She's a midwife who we adore, so I'll mention all of those things.

Sarah Trott: [00:47:48] There's a lot of information, so just go to our site for this episode if you want to go check all of that out. So thank you so much, listeners. And Kari, thank you so much again for gracing us with your wisdom and sharing everything that you have today.

Kari Marble: [00:48:03] Oh, a pleasure. Thanks so much for the opportunity and for all of your beautiful work.

Sarah Trott: You can also subscribe to this podcast in order to hear more from us. [Click here for iTunes](#) and [click here for Google Podcasts](#). Thank you for listening everyone and I hope you'll join us next time on the Fourth Trimester. The theme music on this podcast was created by Sean Trott. Hear more at <https://soundcloud.com/seantrott>. Special thanks to my true loves: my husband Ben, daughter Penelope, and baby girl Evelyn. Don't forget to share the Fourth Trimester Podcast with any new and expecting parents. I'm Sarah Trott. Goodbye for now.