

## **A dance in human communication: The Infant Ballet**

**Tony White**

*On the birth of their son, psychologist Tony White wrote a touching narration for his wife. She suggested he shared it with MIND readers.*

The day arrives after nine months of preparation. After nausea, after ultrasound, after doctors, after nurses, after labour, after congratulations, after presents, after visitors; what then? Parent and infant sit looking at each other, alone together. Two beings from different worlds; from two different planets; stare at each other. How are they ever going to learn to talk? How are they ever going to learn to dance, together in harmony?

Both begin by demanding that the other learn *their* language. The infant cries louder and longer--"Listen to me! You should understand me!" The parent talks to the infant. "What do you want? I've changed your nappy, so stop crying!" The infant cries. It is put to the breast. The infant cries. It is rocked and cuddled.

After a time all goes quiet. Infant stares at parent. Parent stares at infant. Fear and anger sit in their faces. "OK perhaps I can learn your ballet", ponder parent and infant. "I'll teach you, and you teach me" ponder infant and parent.

They struggle on. Each has the wrong timing. Four hourly feeds is the tempo: or so they think says the sleeping infant. Four o'clock and still the infant slumbers. The face is brushed with a wet towel, up and down on the knee, patted on the back, nappy changed, and face forced to the breast. The infant grunts in frustration. "That is your tempo not mine" the infant protests. A battle of wills ensues. "Yes you will; no I won't" demand parent and infant. Anger, fear, confusion, frustration become part of the ballet.

Again all goes quiet. Again parent looks at infant, and infant at parent. "We do this together, fifty/fifty, or not at all" says the infant. Together they press on, parent learns to talk 'infant', and infant learns to talk 'parent'. Slowly they learn the dance. The tempo, the steps, who leads, who follows, when, where and how are all decided. Finally on opening night the ballet is presented in all its finery, fury, beauty and grace, that is capable in the

communication between parent and infant. Eventually, the infant ballet is mastered.

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