



LLLGB National Workshop

Dr. Suzanne Colson: Reclaiming the Art of Breastfeeding

*Neonatal self attachment and breastfeeding reflexes:
Biological Nurturing, a new approach to breastfeeding*

Report by Beth Svarovska, LLL Guildford

Delegates at La Leche League GB's national workshop were treated to a pre-publication overview of Dr. Suzanne Colson's latest research on Biological Nurturing, primitive neonatal reflexes and breastfeeding outcomes. Dr. Colson is senior lecturer and researcher in midwifery at Canterbury Christchurch University and co-founder of LLL France.

Dr. Colson began with a summary of current breastfeeding statistics: initiation rates are fairly static and many mums give up breastfeeding before they planned. In the light of this, she asked, is it time to rethink how mothers learn breastfeeding? Colson proposes Biological Nurturing as an alternative to the "positioning and attachment" approach to initiating and establishing breastfeeding.

So what is Biological Nurturing and how does it relate to breastfeeding? If I were a baby, I'd describe it as "having really comfy cuddles." My neo-natal self continues: "When my really comfy cuddles are with Mummy, if I fancy a snack I can cruise over to the buffet."

In Biological Nurturing, the mother is reclined as much as she feels comfortable, perhaps lying flat, supported by pillows. Baby lies face down on top of her with his entire front in contact with her body or part of the immediate environment, such as a pillow or book. They can be in skin-to-skin contact or lightly dressed. Mum's arms simply provide a "containing envelope" for the baby rather than actively holding

him, since gravity supports them both. Together they interact: touching, nuzzling, stimulating each other's innate instincts and reflexes to get to know each other and gently initiate feeding. The midwife's role is subtly to help those instincts in the mother to surface - to help the woman claim the art of breastfeeding as her own.

In contrast to the "positioning and attachment" approach to breastfeeding which can be prescriptive, hands-on and may involve stifling neonatal feeding reflexes, the postures and positions in Biological Nurturing are fluid and extremely variable. Babies born by Caesarean have successfully initiated feeding whilst draped over their mothers' shoulders in Biological Nurturing positions, even though the babies' reflexes may be only weakly present.

In discussion with Dr. Colson, one LLL leader explained that mums she had tried to help using Biological Nurturing had found it hard to relinquish conventional ideas of "getting your baby to breastfeed" using upright positions, partly for reasons of social conformity. However, Dr. Colson explained that once feeding is established using Biological Nurturing, mums tend to find it easy to transition to other positions such as the cradle hold. I can vouch for the effectiveness of Biological Nurturing as a breastfeeding rescue strategy: I am indebted to LLL Leader Beth Bejnarowicz who used a Biological Nurturing-style approach to help resolve a posture-related feeding problem when my daughter was several months old.



Key aspects of Biological Nurturing include harnessing gravity and the myriad positions in which a baby can achieve full front contact with his mother (Colson coins the term "post-natal lie," inspired by "ante-natal lie"). Now that Colson has articulated this natural approach to breastfeeding, its similarities with natural childbirth are clear. The influence of Colson's experience working with Dr Michel Odent is evident. The compelling continuum of natural childbirth to Biological Nurturing will probably resonate with progressive health professionals, which may help Colson as she seeks to influence mainstream breastfeeding practice.

Colson has revealed an approach to breastfeeding that mothers and midwives have been instinctively using for millennia, but that has been overlooked -- almost a lost art. By applying formal research methodology, deconstructing and labelling a natural behaviour, she has aimed to satisfy a modern desire for intellectual justification and statistical proof. It will not

come as a surprise to LLL members that her evidence suggests that "doing what comes naturally" can be very effective. But in the communication age we tend to put aside our instincts in favour of cognition and control - alternatively we abdicate to "specialists" -- both of which can impair our natural ability to give birth and nurture our young at the breast. In the course of introducing Biological Nurturing to the wider community, with its check-boxes and protocols, Colson and her followers face the challenge of protecting Biological Nurturing's integrity as an instinctual and non-interventionist approach - and thereby retaining the secret of its success.

Dr. Colson's research and videos will be available soon. In the meantime, for more information, see www.biologicalnurturing.com, or make a single or bulk order of Suzanne's nurturing booklet, which has been approved by LLL groups, by contacting joelledufur@yahoo.co.uk