



HOW TO...

Speak up to address family beliefs and traditions that may not be helpful for mom, for baby or for dad?

Watch the [recording here](#) of the Practical Workshop hosted by Sikunye, discussing how to speak up to address family beliefs and traditions that may not be helpful for mom, for baby or for dad. Have you seen mom (or dad) practicing a family belief or tradition that is not helpful for mom, for baby or for dad? Are there some things that you are not sure whether mom should be doing? When you see this practice or belief or tradition – do you know how to have a conversation with mom/dad that will help them walk away with information to choose a different practice to any that may be unhelpful or harmful to mom, baby or dad?

We interviewed Sinikiwe Mqadi from Ububele Educational and Psychotherapy Trust, who was a Flourish host and is now a mom in the First Thousand Days about how to speak up with families and caregivers about what would be helpful to mom, baby and dad in the First Thousand Days (FTD).

Belief: Mom can't eat oranges (or bananas, pineapple and other orange or yellow foods) because her baby will get jaundice!

Fact: Oranges are full of vitamin C. Vitamin C helps baby's bones to grow properly. Citrus can also help with a woman's digestion and deter morning sickness during pregnancy.

Jaundice is caused by too much *bilirubin* in the blood. Bilirubin is a yellow substance produced when red blood cells, which carry oxygen around the body, are broken down. The bilirubin travels in the bloodstream to the liver. The liver changes the form of the bilirubin so it can be passed out of the body in poo. But if there's too much bilirubin in the blood or the liver cannot get rid of it, the excess bilirubin causes jaundice.

Jaundice is common in newborn babies because babies have a high number of red blood cells in their blood. Their liver is not fully developed, so it's less effective at processing the bilirubin and removing it from the blood. But by the time a baby is around 2 weeks old, they produce less bilirubin and their liver is more effective at removing it from the body. This means the jaundice often corrects itself. It is in no way linked to eating oranges.

Knowing this fact: will help mom not to stress during pregnancy if she eats an orange or anything orange – and then blame herself if baby does have jaundice as she could not have done something to cause it

unhelpful for mom

Belief: Add Marie biscuit to breastmilk when baby is a few weeks old to help baby sleep (or a solid)

Fact: We know that *exclusive breastfeeding* – which is giving baby only breastmilk for the first 6 months of life – is all baby needs. Baby does not need Marie biscuits, pap, porridge or any other concoction as baby's digestive tract has not developed fully yet and cannot digest these items. So it is not good for baby to give a Marie biscuit before 6 months to baby. It is also normal for babies to not sleep for a long period of time. They are new to the world and have a lot to adjust to including differentiating day and night. In fact, breastmilk has hormones that help baby sleep better at night.

But also newborn babies and young babies – are not expected to sleep through the night. They need to be waking regularly (3-4hours) for feeds. This is normal. If babies not sleeping well and mom is still concerned – refer mom to health care provider to see if there is a different problem.

Knowing this fact: Mom will know that the more she breastfeeds, the more milk she will produce to fill baby so baby sleeps.

harmful for baby

Belief: You must let a newborn cry as this is good for baby

Fact: The World Health Organisation (WHO) states that all children need *responsive caregiving* in the FTD. Responsive caregiving is one of the components of the nurturing care framework. It includes observing and responding to children's movements, sounds and gestures and verbal requests/cries.

Another word for Responsive Caregiving is LOVE. Babies and young children need love to grow. This loving bond is so important for the healthy development of the child. Children are completely dependent on their parents to recognise and respond to their needs. And as they cannot speak, they cry. These needs are not only for nutrition and safety, but also for social engagements, cognitive stimulation, emotional regulation and soothing. Effective caregivers observe their child's cues, interpret what the child wants and needs, and respond consistently and appropriately. When baby cries this means she is in distress, and it is important for mom and dad to respond to baby.



Knowing this fact: will help mom to respond to baby's cues and cries in a loving way that ensures baby receives responsive caregiving in the First Thousand Days (FTD).

harmful for baby's development

Belief: No one can visit baby before the umbilical cord falls off (7-21 days)

Fact: This belief is linked to the health of baby, and it was probably a way to wait enough time for baby to be ok and healthy to fight any germs that may come from meeting new people. This is not necessarily a practice that is harmful to mom or baby, but we know that mom needs support – especially after birth – and so by visitors or families, and even the dad not being able to visit mom will make her feel isolated and alone. What about teen moms, single moms, who are even more isolated, and they cannot have people around for a given period of time – in some communities, this time is longer than 21 days. And what if a mom struggles with breastfeeding and decides to give up in the time that she cannot have support around her? Or if she has postnatal depression? if you are not able to visit mom, find other ways to encourage her and support her (e.g. Through WhatsApp calls.

Knowing this fact: it is important for mom to decide and be ok with when visitors can come over. We also do not want to make mom feel pressured to entertain visitors when she has just had a baby. This practice may not be harmful, but it is important for mom to have a community of support around her. Support might just be a small, trusted group of people or close relatives.

unhelpful for mom

Belief: Too much sleep will make your baby lazy while in labour

Fact: How a baby behaves in labour depends on its character. Some are more active in labour while others aren't – something that can be noticed even before birth and while the baby is still in the womb. Some move a lot, others don't. Contractions get them going and wiggling, and while some will work hard, others just don't. It has nothing to do with how much mom sleeps.

Knowing this fact: mom can sleep as much as she likes and as much as she can when pregnant.

unhelpful for mom

Belief: 0-3 months, in many South African cultures the mother has to return to their maiden home

Fact: This is a time for mom to be supported, to heal and to be taught the basics of mothering, and this is good and can be helpful for mom. At the same time it is important it is for dad to be able to bond with baby early. When dad does skin-to-skin with baby in the first few days after birth it increases his bond with baby and protection over baby. We know that the more involved dad is from the very beginning by telling stories, singing, changing nappies, bathing baby all builds baby's brain so that baby grows up with better the child's memory, vocab and problem solving, as well as decreased behavioural problems in pre-school. Engaged fatherhood can help in ensuring children's access to health and education and serve as a buffer against abuse, neglect, and violence.

With all these facts, we must still be respectful of mom being able to go and get support from her family home, and when she returns you can help mom and dad find ways for dad to bond with baby – and knowing that by not having dad present and involved in the beginning of life will have lifelong impact on a baby – mom and dad can look at other ways to make sure he is involved and supportive, even if in the first few months he cannot bond with baby.

unhelpful for dad & baby

Belief: A father cannot change a baby's nappy

Fact: What we know is that Dad can be playful even when changing nappies, bathing, massaging, or feeding baby – it improves baby's heartrate and respiration rate. But it also impacts the dad's health and wellbeing. And that by dad being part of everyday actions like bathing, feeding, changing nappies, putting to bed – these all increase the bond with baby, that makes dad more protective of baby and the family whilst making dad want to be more involved. So for long term flourishing of baby this is not a harmful practice, but it is not helpful for baby.

unhelpful for dad & baby



Belief: If a mom stands in a doorway, she won't be able to deliver naturally

Fact: The reason mom cannot deliver naturally has no link to whether she stood in a doorway whilst pregnant or not. There is no medical or scientific proof of this. So this belief rather makes mom fearful or anxious and that has been shown to have negative consequences on baby and mom.

Knowing this fact: will help to relieve any anxiety or stress on mom and therefore have negative effects on baby

unhelpful for mom

Belief: Sleeping on your back can hurt the baby (when pregnant)

Fact: Once you get to the third trimester of pregnancy, health practitioners don't recommend lying flat on your back for any prolonged (long) period of time. Why? When you lie on your back, the increased weight of your uterus presses on the major vein that returns blood from your legs to your heart. Lying on your back for an extended period could interfere with the flow of blood and nutrients to the placenta and your developing baby. Sleep on your side – but don't get a fright if you wake up on your back. Baby will be fine.

Knowing this fact: the last part of this practice is important – there is truth in this belief, however, baby will still be fine if mom wakes up on her back

unhelpful for mom

Belief: Stoney beer is good for reflux

Fact: ginger helps with reflux, which is true, but Stoney ginger beer does not have ginger in it so it is not helpful for mom – it is not harmful to drink Stoney ginger beer, but if baby has reflux it is important for mom to know to seek support from the clinic to help her baby, and not get stressed that she is not drinking enough Stoney beer so baby has reflux.

unhelpful

Belief: Don't reveal your pregnancy early, only announce it after the 1st trimester.

Fact: This practice has been passed down because of the idea that if mom was to miscarry it is best that no one else knows about the pregnancy so you do not need to tell anyone you lost the baby. But some also believe that revealing a pregnancy early could be extremely dangerous if your enemies find out you are pregnant as they will pay a witch to bewitch you and you will lose the baby. But what about mom needing the support if she does miscarry?

Knowing this fact: will help mom get support around her as she goes through her pregnancy, and should anything happen, she is not on her own to grieve.

unhelpful for mom

Other beliefs and practices:

1. When a baby has hiccups you must put newspaper on the forehead
2. The baby must not look at the mirror
3. You must not let the child look outside the window
4. If your child is not teething you must give the child pancake to eat then the teeth will come
5. Mom has reflux because baby's hair is tickling mum's tummy
6. When you are pregnant you are not allowed to eat eggs
7. When pregnant there are limits of where you can go, like church or funerals .
8. A pregnant woman must not lift up her hands or take something that is higher than her because it can cause umbilical cord to wrap around baby's neck

These beliefs are not based on fact and the fear or anxiety they may cause in mom can be harmful or unhelpful to mom, dad and baby!

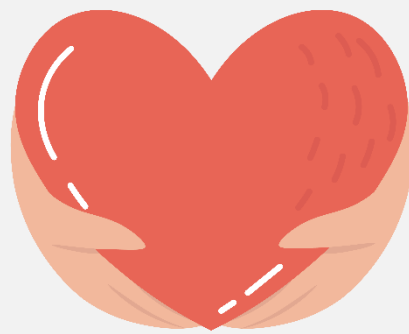
It is important to remember:

No one willingly chooses to do something that will hurt baby or themselves. So as FTD-friendly churches you can help mom to see what practices are not good or not helpful for mom or baby – and where she can get the correct information to help her decide what practices or traditions she is going to do. Some practices are harmless, or unhelpful, and others dangerous/harmful for mom or baby. Always remember to speak to mom and dad with compassion. Remove all judgement and instead understand why mom or dad believes in a family practice or tradition, and help mom and dad to think through whether it is helpful or harmful to them or baby.

RESOURCES:

- The Road to Health book
- Side by side: <https://sidebyside.co.za/>
- Flourish: <https://flourishnetwork.org.za/>
- <https://www.news24.com/life/Archive/5-pregnancy-myths-busted-20171012>
- <https://www.voanews.com/a/in-africa-myths-superstitions-about-childbirth-endanger-mother-baby/2577200.html>
- <https://www.pregnancybirthbaby.org.au/common-myths-about-pregnancy>

*Always remember to speak with compassion
and love!*



LOVE