

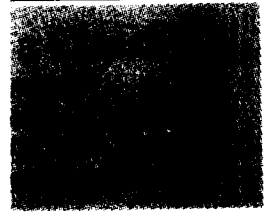
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Fathers Fill Prenatal Classes

Leslie Wiles Teaches Roles for Both Parents

By LIBBY CARTY McNAMEE

"Call me at home any time, day or night, if you need any help with your baby," Leslie Wiles told the auditorium, packed full of the nervous expectant parents attending her breastfeeding class.

With a master's degree in maternal/child nursing and nursing administration, Wiles has been handing out her home phone number for the entire 30 years of her nursing and teaching career. She has no regrets, declaring that no one has ever taken advantage of it.

"Timing is critical with breastfeeding. If my advice helps keep a woman breastfeeding longer, it is worth every minute of it, no matter what time it is." Wiles has definitely found her niche.

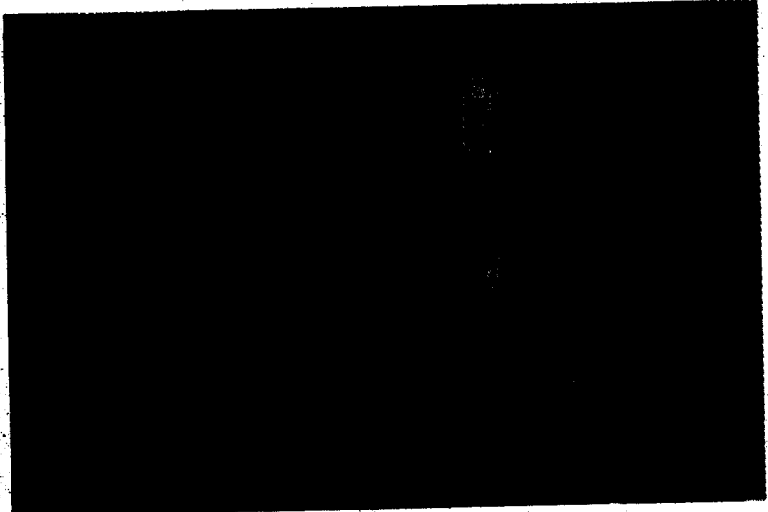
"This is my dream job," she said. "I enjoy every aspect of it, especially the patient contact. Open communication leads to better patient care all around, which is better for everyone."

Dads' Vital Role

Interestingly enough, Wiles' breastfeeding classes are filled with just as many dads as moms. In fact, she recently taught a class in which there were actually more men than women attending. Why would this happen? Her teaching reflects her progressive philosophy that fathers play just as vital a role in nurturing newborns as mothers do.

Thirty minutes of her two-and-a-half hour breastfeeding class are dedicated to discussing the father's role, outlining concrete activities and specific jobs for him to perform. She explained, "Since babies do not smell breast milk on their fathers the way they do with their lactating mothers, fathers can play a unique role in settling a fussy baby while fostering a parent-infant bond."

As a result, fathers feel included and needed in the nurturing of their newborn, cultivating the formation of a healthy and successful family unit with



Leslie Wiles, R.N., M.S.N., teaches that fathers have a vital nurturing role. (Photo: Frost)

positive parent-baby interaction.

As director of prenatal education and lactation education and support at Richmond OB-Gyn Associates, Wiles' goal is to empower mothers *and* fathers with knowledge that will allow them both to be successful parents. She wants parents to share this "incredible time in their lives" with a positive childbirth experience made possible by an educated decision-making process.

For optimal development, she encourages parents to look at their newborn holistically and nurture all five senses that are intact at birth. "New parents are so focused on their first task as parents, which understandably is to keep the baby alive," she said. "As a result, they are intensely interested in the feeding aspect of the baby, its intake and output. But there is so much more to a newborn than just the gastrointestinal tract."

Wear the Baby

Pointing out that skin is the largest organ in the human body, Wiles commented, "Babies can never have too much skin-to-skin contact." This is where dear old Dad comes into the picture for her version of

"kangaroo care." She instructs fathers to take an oversized soft cotton t-shirt and wrap it around themselves while holding the baby. She recommends that dads "wear" their baby while wrapped in the t-shirt for two hours a day. This nurturing technique creates a unique rhythm with the baby that is not based on a feeding schedule. For newborns, hearing their father's heartbeat and feeling their body warmth recreates the familiar comforts of the womb.

When teaching Lamaze classes for couples, Wiles also offers instruction expressly directed to the expectant father on how to coach his partner effectively. She highly recommends repeating positive phrases such as, "You're doing a great job" and "I love you," as well as informing his partner when her contraction has peaked.

In addition to Wiles' impressive professionalism, she too is a parent. She voiced her own anxieties about her son's upcoming jaw surgery, then reminded herself with a chuckle, "I need to take the same advice that I give to my patients and just try to relax." **RPM**