

FOCUSING WITH “BABY ON BOARD”

Barbara Dickinson, C.F.T.

At an online Virtual Changes meeting two years ago, one of the participants, a young woman, said she was pregnant and very interested to know what benefits Focusing might have for her unborn child.

My personal ‘policy’ is to jump in whenever there is an opportunity to apply Focusing in an interesting new way. Undeterred by the 600 miles between us, I therefore said, “I would love to try guiding your Focusing, if you would!”

My response was the beginning of a relationship lasting through her high-risk pregnancy, the birth of her child, and the time following delivery during which she has had many serious medical problems. Our Focusing sessions have dealt with the distress of some life-threatening situations in which she found herself. We have also included her baby, who has grown into an absolutely delightful eighteen month old. While this is a memoir of one of those sessions, we are still going strong, which explains the use of both current and past tense.

Guiding Momma, I always begin with a lead-in that I customize, depending on her concerns of the day. The session we both remember best started with Momma’s worry over something that seemed to be upsetting her baby. In this case—and this may be the first time it happened—I spent more than the usual amount of time helping Momma sense into both her own body and that of her baby. One of our favorite instructions in the lead-in is “Place a gentle hand over that area, and notice not one heartbeat, but two.”

Me: *“Take your time to settle into the furniture and get as comfortable as you can! (Gentle laughter from mother-to-be and her guide, a mother of two!) Scan your body and notice textures, temperatures, and sensations on the surface and beneath the surface. Notice your pulse, and your breath, and relax into the rhythm of those natural processes.*

Now take whatever time you need...and bring your attention to the middle area of your body...just resting...with your compassion directed toward the baby you are carrying there. And then...maybe just notice how it is with her today (we knew it was ‘her’)...and offer an ever-so-gentle inquiry...‘How are you today, my Dear Little One?’...And wait...to see whatever comes...”

Momma could almost always clear the space for herself and set aside all of her concerns. This time, when she did, her unborn baby seemed to take that same guidance, and both relaxed—as it seemed to Momma’s felt sensing—and as it was in reality as Momma sat with a less active belly!

Momma: *“I’m worried more than usual because the baby seems to be upset lately. The Baby seems to be moving around in a really uncomfortable way. There are these sudden, jolting movements, almost a “thrashing.” And it’s happening over and over again.”*

Me: *“You’re really worried...I’m wondering if you could take some time for yourself in presence...as much as you can...to make more space for what is coming from the baby...”*

Me: *“I’m wondering if it’s possible to sense into how it is with Baby...and how Momma is with Baby.”* (In this way, she could practice and eventually more easily calm herself, and “sense that calm toward” her Baby as well, from a place of grounding, or presence. It was our intention from the start of this adventure that Baby would come into the world already a practiced Focuser! It certainly seems from our experiences, especially this one, that Focusing with “Baby on Board” has had just that effect, tuning Momma into Baby and vice versa in a way that can continue long after the birth takes place.)

Momma: *“I’m getting a felt sense in the whole middle area of my body...and that includes the Baby...and I’m getting something about “full”...about what I’m eating and the reactions the baby gets afterwards. (Several seconds pass)...“Oh there’s something connecting this sense of “full” and the reactions of distress from Baby!”. (As in many Focusing associations, we do not have an explanation to “connect the dots” in this session. Momma sensed...and these food connections came.)*

Me: (Because the word that came as the anchor for the felt sense of the whole of “Momma and Baby” was “thrashing,” in a very interactive way, an image came to me of my own tiny baby years ago—the one who had a colicky kind of digestive difficulty—and the way he used to flail about in discomfort when one of the fits of colic overcame him. In many cases, young children outgrow these digestive reactions. In other cases, they can be signs of food sensitivities, allergies, or even more serious conditions. Now two mothers were on high alert! What if this was one of those?)

At the time of this session, I had recently been dealing with my now grown son, who had just begun a journey into gluten-free eating. Perhaps it was my heightened sensitivity to his issues that inspired my next question. Focusing has the power to bring forth from the whole body all kinds of wisdom, which often takes the form of connections I would otherwise never make. I offered that suggestion. *“Maybe take some time...to sense into the possibility that there might be some reactivity on the part of Baby to specific foods that you, Momma, are eating, rather than an overall eating problem.”* (If sensitivity or allergy was the cause, then Momma could learn more about what foods might be causing these uncomfortable reactions, and then remove them from her own eating.)

Momma: *Let me sit quietly with that, and let the baby sit with that too (pausing and sensing for about a minute) Yes, something we are eating...something we are eating is really coming to my attention...I’m just not sure what...but this thrashing, and the contractions it causes...they are suddenly seeming related to food.*

Me: *“I’m wondering if you might ask Baby about her sense of receiving some nourishment...that maybe is irritating...”*

Momma: *“So I’m switching focus now...sensing into Baby, and asking, ‘How are you doing, sweetheart? (Several seconds pass.)... Oh...I’m getting something from Baby that she’s...distressed...definitely, I’m getting something...that all of the activity we see coming from her...the fact that she doesn’t hold still for a second...for hours on end...it is not just because she is playful...It is not joyful, peaceful movement. She is moving because she is distressed. Oh wow, this is startling new information...very important...I need to pay attention or this information could get lost.*

Momma/Baby/me: Any time we invited the baby into the felt sensing experience, we waited patiently for anything that seemed like confirmation of what we were learning from her/their felt sense. This time it seemed quite clear...in a felt way...that the baby in some way *agreed* with our felt understanding about sensitivity to certain foods. As with many associations that come through Focusing, we cannot describe how Momma *knew* this, but the baby’s movement changed when Momma made the realization and there was a sense of harmony with Momma that had been hard to find in recent days. Also, an image came to Momma of the baby being capable of being still and peaceful in the future. We had spent so much time together on these issues, and the proofs had arrived so reliably afterward, that we felt confident we were getting a right “reading” from Baby.

At this point in her pregnancy, Momma was having a lot of pre-term labor and contractions. She would go into the hospital and watch Baby on the monitor moving constantly for hours upon end, without being still for a second. More than one ‘something’ in Momma felt scared, troubled and exhausted from witnessing Baby’s incessant thrashing. Motivated by what she had sensed during her latest Focusing session, Momma started taking careful note of what she was eating, by noticing what foods seemed to bring on a reaction of distress. She quickly discovered that by paying such close attention to Baby’s reactions, she could regulate her own diet to the benefit of her baby and minimize these distressed episodes. What a relief! And what a miracle! Baby was still active at this point, but it felt like normal activity, and now was full of graceful, peaceful, enthusiastic and fun movements, not a distressed thrashing like Momma felt previously.

Within a week, the contractions stopped completely, and Baby made it all the way until her due date. This was amazing, given that contractions had begun as early as 17 weeks and Baby was labeled as high risk the entire pregnancy. After the birth, her food allergies were confirmed, and as it turned out gluten was, indeed, one of the culprits. Momma continued to avoid gluten while she was breastfeeding, and Baby was an incredibly joyful, peaceful baby.

We are confident that had we not gained awareness of the food allergy information so early, she could have easily been labeled a “colicky” or “fussy” baby because she would have had a constant tummy ache. Because of this early awareness, Momma was also able to take Baby in for some holistic, non-invasive allergy treatments at a very young age, which helped Baby overcome her allergies, since babies tend to be very responsive to treatments like this when they are done early.

One of my greatest joys throughout this adventure in Focusing with “Baby on Board” is the confirmation of the beneficial results of our work together—and the relatively immediate benefits at that. Our session on “thrashing” was one of the most powerful—more than

any of the other sessions—and convinced us both that the Focusing process opens up a wonderful area of parent-child bonding, even before birth!

Momma had some complications with delivery that caused some severe, life-threatening health issues the first few months of Baby's life, which required her to be in the hospital and away from Baby more than any new mom would ever want. One of her saving graces during this time was that she already had such a solid, strong bond with Baby that the bond carried them through this time and Baby is still to this day such a "Momma's Girl." Using what she learned through Focusing and simply being Focusing-minded in the way she parented, she already had such a clear understanding of what Baby's needs were and how to best meet them that when she needed to rely on family to care for Baby while she was in the hospital, she knew exactly how to instruct them on what Baby most needed.

Momma, Baby and I continue to do guided Focusing as Baby grows. The felt sense I have (every time I see that little girl toddling around on the computer screen) is of a ball of light with a tiny heart at the center firmly cradled in my middle, warm, and cozy, and joyful. And all on the Internet!



This article is a collaboration between Momma and me. We both say, "I couldn't have done it without you!"

Barbara Dickinson is a senior executive who has just finished a long career in management in the U.S. Federal Reserve. Since she learned Focusing in 2006, she has become an enthusiastic learner and teacher of the many facets of Focusing and thinking at the edge. She volunteered her services to The Focusing Institute as a management consultant from 2010-2012. Barbara is currently studying Thinking At The Edge with Nada Lou and hopes

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If you would like to learn more about Changes Groups of all types, and especially the Virtual Changes meetings that led to this happy story, please visit <http://focusing.org/changes.htm>.