

Story massage



Adding positive touch to stories and rhymes

The enjoyment of stories and rhymes is as natural and intuitive as sharing the benefits of nurturing touch. The Story Massage Programme is a fun way of bringing storytelling and positive touch together with simple massage strokes (given through clothes) that are used to 'illustrate' the words of the story. This powerful combination can encourage relaxation and wellbeing, emotional regulation and building positive relationships.

The Story Massage Programme is a set of ten easy-to-follow massage strokes, each with a child-friendly name such as The Wave or The Sprinkle, and a symbol. These strokes are used to represent a range of actions, objects and emotions to really bring the words of a story or rhyme to life. Tracing a large circle on a child's back, for example, can depict a sun while raking the fingers can illustrate lions' claws. It is a fun and fully inclusive activity which is enjoyed in a range of settings with children and adults of all ages and abilities – from 0 to 100 years.

The programme is wonderfully flexible and can be adapted to suit the particular needs of individuals, groups and occasions. No oil is used, and children do not need to remove any clothes. Massage stories can be shared as adult to child or peer massage – as a personalised session or a group activity. Children can sit or stand, one-to-one or in a line or a circle. Strokes can be given on any part of the body that is accessible and appropriate. You can choose favourite or curriculum-based stories, rhymes and books to adapt as massage stories, or write new ones as a fun and creative activity to reflect interests, activities or events.

Integral to the programme is asking permission to touch, and respect is shown for the right to decline to take part. At the end of the session, the person giving the massage story should thank the recipient for the chance to share the activity. This is proving to be a very helpful and effective way of starting to discuss the important issues of consent for touch.

Here are some of the key benefits of introducing the Story Massage Programme:

Building respect and positive relationships

The shared connection of massage stories can help children see the benefits of being kind and respectful to others. Children are nurturing and caring in a safe and positive way that some may not have been able to access or express before. They become more sensitive to how their own actions and emotions can influence those of others. Over time, it can encourage discussion of concerns or anxieties in a safe and nurturing context, helping to foster positive, trusting bonds. One-to-one sessions with an adult can enhance a child's awareness of being valued and brings a sense of self-worth. Stories can be chosen on topics such as making friends or having a new baby in the family.

Regulating difficult emotions

Sharing a massage story can help to calm a child at stressful times such as leaving a parent at the start of the day or after an argument with a friend. This simple interaction can help soothe and focus children, so they are able to move on to the next activity in a more positive frame of mind. Children also start to recognise that sharing a massage story can be used to help others when they are feeling sad or need some time to relax.

Learning co-operation skills

The shared experience of writing and giving/receiving massage stories can help children to support each other. They will often work together to become more self-aware and develop self-esteem. Examples could be writing a personalised massage story for a child's birthday, preparing for an outing or learning the 'rules' of the group. Celebrating different cultural events through massage stories provides opportunities for respectful reflection on the ways in which people from different cultures mark special occasions on their calendar.

Relaxation of mind and body

Story Massage sessions can offer a dedicated 'calming time' helping children to learn the essential life skill of conscious relaxation through first-hand experience. Children learn to 'switch-off' and enjoy the benefits of recharging and refreshing mind and body. The shared activity of a Story Massage session promotes 'feel-good' hormones including oxytocin which helps to boost general wellbeing.

Promoting literacy and creativity

The storytelling element of the activity helps encourage children's imagination and desire to read and write simple stories. It offers a chance for children to explore topics from a new angle and develop a wider vocabulary.

Hickory dickory dock

This rhyme, adapted for a Story Massage activity, uses three of the ten massage strokes. It is taken from the book: "Once Upon a Touch... Story Massage for Children" by Mary Atkinson and Sandra Hooper. The instructions are given for massaging a child's back but do remember that you can massage wherever is most suitable for the recipient.

You can follow along with this favourite nursery rhyme on the Story Massage Programme YouTube Channel: <https://youtu.be/dDhmlITTCds>

The three strokes that are used are:




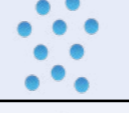

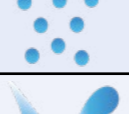


The Bounce – With both hands working at the same time, place the pads of the fingers and thumbs on your partner's back. Gently squeeze the fingers and thumb of each hand together and lift off quickly. Repeat this 'bouncing' move all over the back.



The Sprinkle – With both hands working at the same time, lightly tap the pads of your fingers in a random fashion up the back as if playing the piano. This is a light and gentle movement.



The Circle – Rest one hand on your partner's shoulder. With the flat of one hand, make a large, circular movement on the back. This can be in a clockwise or anti-clockwise direction.

Action	Rhyme line
	First: ask for permission to touch
	Hickory dickory dock,
	The mouse ran up the clock,
	The clock struck one,
	The mouse ran down,
	Hickory dickory dock,
Say 'thank you' to the recipient.	



Mary Atkinson

Mary Atkinson (left) and Sandra Hooper (right) are co-founders of the Story Massage Programme, launched in 2013 and now an international success. Mary is a complementary therapist, tutor and author of four books on massage including "Healing Touch for Children". She regularly writes articles for national magazines on the power of positive touch.

Sandra is an experienced primary school teacher and massage therapist. She has worked with national parenting programmes whose main goal is to increase the knowledge and confidence of parents. They share a passion for enabling others to deliver safe, nurturing touch to enrich the lives of children of all ages and abilities. In November 2020, Mary was presented with the [FHT Complementary Therapist of the Year Award](#) for her work with live Story Massage sessions during lockdown (accompanied by her well-dressed Teddy, Emmanuel) on social media, bringing comfort and connection to thousands of people in pre-schools, homes and schools.

You can find details of all her resources including "Once upon a touch...story massage for children" [here](#) and her [flexible online training courses](#) open to all can be found here.

You can contact Mary through her website: www.storymassage.co.uk