

# Book Review

## The Baby as Subject

### New directions in Infant-Parent Therapy

From the Royal Children's  
Hospital, Melbourne

Edited by Frances Thomson  
Salo and Campbell Paul.  
Stonnington Press, Melbourne,  
2007.

Reviewed by Miri Keren, M.D.,  
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This book is about holding the  
sick/vulnerable infant in our own  
minds and speaking directly with  
him/her, in the parents' presence. The  
authors show, through vivid clinical  
vignettes, how understanding the

infant's experience in vulnerable  
environments, is a major Infant  
Mental Health professional's task.  
Safety, Reliability, and Truthfulness  
in the relationship between the  
parent and the infant, the therapist  
and the infant, are the three rules of  
thumb that reflect the approach to the  
baby as a subject, regardless of how  
vulnerable the baby may be.

The poignant vignette of a dying  
lively three year-old boy, illustrates  
the application of these three  
principles in the therapeutic working-  
through of the impending ultimate  
separation of the child from his  
parents and brother, and brings a  
new dimension to the role of the  
IMH therapist in these no-win  
situations. The therapist's role is  
to show the parents, as well as the  
pediatric setting, the capacity of  
these vulnerable infants to experience  
creative moments in spite of their  
suffering, and thus facilitating a new

perception of the infant as a subject.  
Special clinical situations are evoked,  
while asking about ways infants  
perceive them. For instance, what does  
the infant born of a rape glean from  
the look in his/her mother's eyes?  
Campbell Paul asks.

Modes of therapy may be variable,  
such as individual treatment with a  
withdrawn, almost autistic 28 month  
old boy with food refusal, or a mother-  
infant group psychotherapy, or a music  
therapy, but all of them should be  
characterized by "serious playfulness",  
as a new dimension brought by the  
therapist.

This book has a special flavor of  
keenness, the one that characterizes  
clinician who dare "talking true" to  
infants and toddlers, regardless of the  
nature of their suffering and prognosis,  
as the French child Psychoanalyst  
Francoise Dolto wrote and taught.

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