

# LACK OF INTERACTION TAKING ITS TOLL

Continued from page 1

bonding and connecting with other people, especially those family members that live outside of their home and are wearing masks and/or standing six feet away."

Many local parents are experiencing this situation firsthand, like Anneliese Lawton. The mother of three said she and her husband refer to their 10-month-old daughter as their 'pandemic baby' because "she's super clingy to me."

She hasn't even been babysat by anybody, so she is on me 24/7 and she sleeps with me. I'm all she knows."

The isolation of the past year has also impacted Lawton's three-year-old son. While she said her middle child is naturally more shy due to a speech delay, she has noticed changes in his behaviour around other people.

"We will go to the park and he'll scream, 'Mommy there's kids here, I don't want the kids near me.' His shyness and his fear of people has really ramped up," said Lawton, adding that her son is in treatment for his speech delay, but the appointments keep getting cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Giavedoni acknowledged that the pandemic has limited access to health

care professionals for some and left gaps in services and referrals.

"This has been especially impactful on supporting new parents and perinatal relationships," she said.

While they say it takes a village to raise a child, new mothers at home with babies have largely lost their in-person support systems and socialization opportunities over the past year, said Tina De Crisci, co-founder of Duran Place for Kids in Oakville.

"They (new mothers) are so strong, but they're so alone," she said, noting she heard from many mothers pre-lockdown who were desperate for face-to-face programs where they could connect and socialize with other moms and babies. "There is no village out there now. There's no girlfriend coming over and saying, 'Go take a shower, I'll hold the baby.' They're at home with no support."

The sentiment was echoed by first-time mother Leanna Potocnik, who said it's been challenging to raise her 15-month-old daughter with only her husband to lean on.

"I feel like my first year of motherhood would've been so much less stressful and a lot easier if I had been able to have any family come help," said the Acton native. "I haven't been able to go on mommy/baby



Graham Paine/Metroland

ROCK program manager Carla Giavedoni sits in the EarlyON Child and Family Centre, currently empty due to pandemic restrictions.

playdates either, which also would help with the mental challenges of a first-time mom as without that socializing, you feel like you're alone."

So what's a worn-out mother to do at a time like this, not only for her own mental health, but also the development of her young children?

Giavedoni said there are virtual resources and programming available for infants, toddlers and parents

through the ROCK's EarlyON Child and Family Centre. Similar EarlyON centres throughout Halton are also offering virtual programs and support.

"Even though we are physically isolated, we do not need to not be socially isolated," she said. "These programs connect parents and caregivers to their community and provide a safe space for parents to socialize and share their similar experiences. Virtually,

families invite us into their homes, and we do our best to listen and support them during this time."

To further help babies and young kids as the pandemic continues, Giavedoni said parents can foster resiliency through a nurturing relationship with their child and support development via responsive parental interactions.

"A smile makes a difference," she said. "A simple smile while engaging with

## RESOURCES FOR KIDS

**Reach out Centre for Kids:**  
rockonline.ca

**ErinoakKids:**  
erinoakkids.ca

**EarlyON programming through: ROCK (Burlington):**  
rockonline.ca/earlyonandfamilycentre

**Oakville Parent-Child Centre:**  
op-cc.ca

**Links2Care (Halton Hills):**  
links2care.ca

**Milton Community Resource Centre:** mcrc.on.ca

your infant can contribute to their healthy brain development."

And while it may seem like an impossible task at this time, Giavedoni stressed the importance of self-care to combat pandemic parenting fatigue.

"Taking care of yourself will support your child through this pandemic and overcome barriers that may pop up along the way," she said. "You don't need to be a perfect parent, just a present parent."

*STORY BEHIND THE STORY: With local babies and toddlers having spent much of their young lives in a pandemic world, we wanted to take a closer look at the impact this is having on them and their parents, and how to overcome the challenges.*

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