The Nurtured Sleep Revolution – Presentation Notes

Meeting notes:

- **Introduction of Greer:** Greer introduced herself, sharing her background as a research scientist and work in mental health, genetics, and early brain development. She also mentioned her experience as a doula and her current focus on infant and family sleep education.
- **Importance of Early Relationships:** Rob introduced himself, well known to the group and providing pediatric clinics here at the FHT twice a month.
    - **Early Relational Experiences:** Rob highlighted that early relational experiences are the most powerful in shaping mental health. He emphasized that experiences, especially early ones, significantly shape the brain and that sleep is a relational experience involving both the child and the caregiver.
    - **Role of Sleep:** Rob explained that sleep is a dyadic experience and can be both beneficial and stressful for families. He noted that false expectations about sleep can cause stress and emphasized the importance of developing healthy sleep habits.
    - **Collaboration with Greer:** Rob expressed his interest in discussing these topics further with Greer, who has written about similar concepts in her book "The Nurture Revolution." Rob resonated with the ideas presented in the book.
- **Medical Perspective on Infant Sleep:** Rob provided a medical perspective on infant sleep, discussing the importance of healthy sleep for physical and mental development. He mentioned various medical conditions that could affect sleep and emphasized the need to rule out medical issues before addressing sleep problems as part of normal development.
    - **Importance of Healthy Sleep:** Rob emphasized that healthy sleep is crucial for physical and mental development, including memory consolidation and sensory information processing. He noted that sleep issues vary at different developmental stages, with infancy focusing on regulatory phenomena.
    - **Medical Conditions Affecting Sleep:** Rob discussed various medical conditions that could affect sleep, such as jaundice, neurological issues, iron deficiency, pain from conditions like eczema or reflux, and anatomical features causing airway obstruction. He stressed the importance of ruling out these medical issues before addressing sleep problems as part of normal development.
    - **Questions for Parents:** Rob mentioned specific questions to ask parents of babies over six months, such as whether the baby is thrashing in sleep, sweating a lot, or sleeping with their mouth open. These questions can help identify issues like low iron or ENT-related problems.
- **Brain Development in Early Years:** Greer provided an overview of brain development in the first three years, highlighting the rapid growth and formation of connections. She explained

the bottom-up development process, starting with the survival brain and progressing to the emotional and thinking brain.

    - **Rapid Brain Growth:** Greer highlighted the rapid brain growth in the first three years, with the brain size increasing from 25% of an adult's brain at birth to 80% by age three. This period involves the formation of millions of connections per second.
    - **Bottom-Up Development:** Greer explained that brain development follows a bottom-up process, starting with the survival brain (brainstem) responsible for basic functions like breathing and digestion. The emotional brain (limbic system) develops next, followed by the thinking brain (cortex).
    - **Emotional Brain Development:** Greer emphasized that the emotional brain, including the stress system and neurotransmitter systems, is highly plastic and forms during infancy. This development is crucial for future mental health and stress regulation.
    - **Thinking Brain Development:** Greer noted that the thinking brain (cortex) develops last and is responsible for functions like impulse control and self-regulation. She highlighted that asking babies to perform tasks requiring the thinking brain can cause stress, as this part of the brain is not fully developed in infancy.

- **Nurturing Infant Sleep:** Greer discussed the importance of nurturing infant sleep and the potential risks of sleep training. She advocated for informed choice for parents and emphasized the benefits of supporting babies' sleep for their emotional and mental health.
    - **Risks of Sleep Training:** Greer discussed the potential risks of sleep training, including the isolation of babies and lack of responsiveness, which can negatively impact emotional brain development. She emphasized the need for informed choice for parents regarding sleep training.
    - **Supporting Infant Sleep:** Greer advocated for supporting babies' sleep by being present and responsive during the first three years. She highlighted that nurturing sleep can lead to healthier sleep patterns and reduce the risk of sleep-related issues like insomnia and sleep avoidance in later years.
    - **Emotional and Mental Health:** Greer emphasized that nurturing sleep is crucial for emotional and mental health, as sleep is a significant part of a baby's life. She noted that responsive caregiving during sleep can foster healthy brain development and stress regulation.
- **Features of Infant Sleep:** Greer outlined five features of infant sleep that parents should understand, including the need for proximity, unique sleep architecture, variability in sleep patterns, normal night wakings, and the impact of breastfeeding on sleep.
    - **Proximity:** Greer explained that proximity to parents is crucial for infant sleep, as babies require the multisensory input of an adult to feel safe. She noted that babies often need to sleep on or beside their parents to feel secure.

    - **Unique Sleep Architecture:** Greer described the unique sleep architecture of infants, including frequent sleep cycles and a high proportion of REM sleep. She explained that babies perform physical checks during active sleep and need reassurance to feel safe.
    - **Variability in Sleep Patterns:** Greer highlighted the variability in infant sleep patterns, noting that there is a wide range of normal sleep durations. She emphasized the importance of understanding each baby's unique sleep needs and avoiding rigid sleep schedules.
    - **Normal Night Wakings:** Greer addressed the common concern of night wakings, explaining that they are a normal feature of infant sleep. She noted that night wakings can continue up to 2.5 years old and are related to the development of the emotional brain.
    - **Impact of Breastfeeding:** Greer debunked the myth that breastfeeding disrupts sleep, emphasizing that breastfeeding does not cause babies to wake up more frequently. She highlighted the importance of breastfeeding for sleep and overall health.
- **Proximity and Safe Sleep:** Greer explained the importance of proximity for infant sleep and will provide resources for safe bed-sharing. She emphasized the need for parents to meet safety criteria and set up a safe sleep environment.
- **Infant Sleep Architecture:** Greer described the unique sleep architecture of infants, including frequent sleep cycles and the need for reassurance during active sleep. She explained how sleep develops over time and the limitations of sleep training in changing sleep architecture.
- **Variability in Infant Sleep:** Greer highlighted the variability in infant sleep patterns and the importance of understanding each baby's unique sleep needs. She provided data on the range of normal sleep durations and emphasized the need for personalized sleep schedules.
- **Night Wakings and Breastfeeding:** Greer addressed the common concern of night wakings and the misconception that breastfeeding disrupts sleep. She emphasized the importance of responding to babies' needs at night and the benefits of breastfeeding for sleep.
- **Supporting Infant Sleep:** Greer provided practical tips for supporting infant sleep, including keeping babies within arm's reach, using tired cues to time naps, optimizing circadian rhythms, and creating a conducive sleep environment.

Follow-up tasks:

- **Safe Bed Sharing Resources:** Share the resources and guidelines for safe bed sharing with the team after today's meeting. GE from Greer
- **Sleep Training PDF:** Distribute the PDF that outlines the issues with sleep training to all participants. GE from Greer

- **Circadian Rhythm Tips:** Provide the handout on using tired cues to time naps and bedtime to all participants. GE from Greer
- **Purple Crying Resource:** Share the Purple Crying resource with the team to help parents understand and manage prolonged crying in infants. GE from Greer