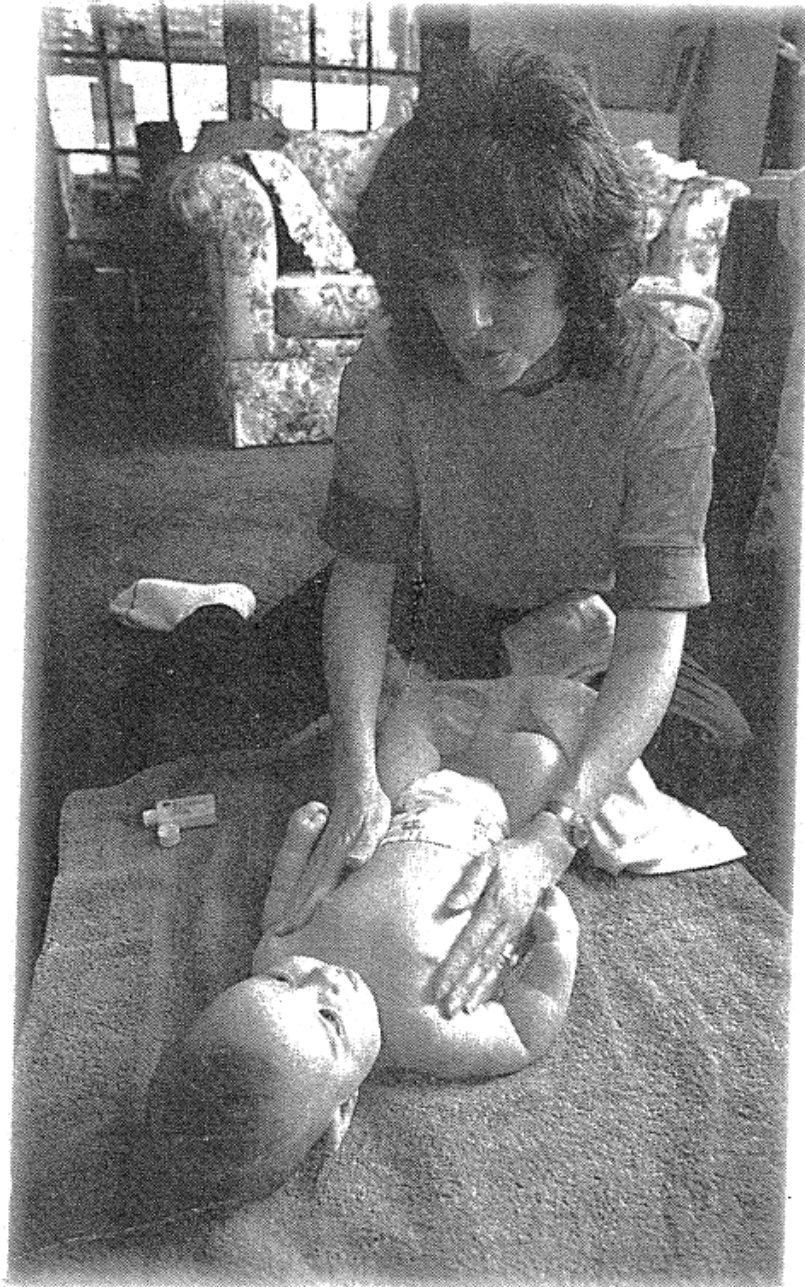


# Infant Massage Offers New Mothers a Chance to Unwind



SCARSDALE

**E**MILY AU lay on her back, her face relaxed. Gently, the instructor bent her knees toward her chest, crossed each plump leg to the opposite side of her body and touched her tiny toes to a spot behind her head.

Looking deep into the instructor's eyes, Emily, 6 months old, was in bliss.

Two-month-old Robert Petrasovits, on the other hand, wailed disconsolately when his mother, Yvonne Petrasovits, tried the same exercise techniques on him. Cuddling him, she watched as Diane Speier, the instructor, established a cooling rapport with another baby, 4-month-old Ariana Reinhertz.

"I can never get him to go 'uhh' when I do that to him," Ms. Petrasovits said, observing the little grunt that Ariana made during the exercise. Ms. Speier smiled. "That's because you're being too gentle," she said. "You are a mom."

New mothers have been flocking to Ms. Speier's "reshape and unwind" classes here since 1981, first exercising while their babies sleep and then sharing moments of physical closeness with their infants.

Ms. Speier, a psychologist whose specialty is child birth and parenthood and who has conducted gymnastics classes for toddlers shows women how to stretch their babies' limbs and prepare for milestones like turning over, sitting up and crawling. The subtext is emotional bonding, sometimes made easier, Ms. Speier says, in the supportive atmosphere of a class.

"The idea is that while they're making the transition into motherhood, they really want to meet other mothers," she said. "They want to get back into shape, but that isn't the primary reason they come. They want to get out of the house and have a social connection."

On one recent afternoon, the talk was about bottles, growth rates and cradle cap, a form of eczema. Arms and legs a-



flutter, the babies seemed unaware of each other but conscious that something special was going on.

"O.K., let's get them undressed," Ms. Speier said, and the babies were stripped to their diapers. Demonstrating on a doll, Ms. Speier showed the women how to massage tiny backs, arms and legs with a soothing lotion. Robert Tornatore, whose mouth had turned down during the stretching exercise, lay contentedly over his mother's knee while she massaged his back.

"It's initially stimulating, but it becomes very relaxing," Ms. Speier said. "Then they nap." ■

Text and photographs  
By ROBERTA HERSHENSON