

Building a Secure Attachment for Your Baby

- **The Name of the Game is Delight:** Babies are “hard-wired” to experience joy with their caregivers in the early months of life. Researchers are finding that mutual joy is the basis for increased brain growth. A baby feels more secure knowing that “Life is good, because my parent enjoys life when s/he is with me.”
- **Every Baby Needs a Holding Environment:** Babies soak up affection and love through their skin. Gentle touch shares the tenderness that every infant requires. Playful touch encourages joy. Holding your baby not only provides pleasure and reassurance, it is essential in helping to soothe and organize difficult feelings.
- **“The Eyes Have It:”** Gaze into your baby’s eyes from the first day of life, and pay close attention to when your child wants to look back. At about six weeks, your child will regularly focus in on your eyes and read what they are “saying.” Lots of pleasurable eye contact will translate into a feeling of reassurance and connection for your baby.
- **Whenever Possible, Follow Your Child’s Lead:** Security of attachment requires a caregiver who is sensitive and responsive to her/his child’s needs. Your willingness to answer subtle requests for attention, comfort, holding, exploration, and discovery (with you nearby) will provide an increased sense of security for your child.
- **You Can’t Spoil a Baby:** Contrary to those who may be saying that you will harm your child if you are “too responsive” to her/his needs, it isn’t possible to spoil a baby in the first 9-10 months of life. Researchers are finding that the most responsive parents actually have children who are less demanding and more self-reliant as they grow older.
- **Stay With Your Child During Difficult Feelings:** Young children often have upset feelings (anger, hurt, sadness, fear) that are too difficult to manage on their own. When your child has an intense feeling, stay with her/him until the feeling has been worked through. Your child will be learning basic trust: “Someone is here with me when I am in difficulty and pain,” and “I can count on a good outcome to follow a difficult experience.”
- **Talk Out Loud about Feelings:** From your child’s earliest days, talking out loud about feelings (your child’s and your own) will begin to help your child to eventually label feelings and realize that they can be shared. As your child gets older, s/he will realize that intense feelings can be named (mad, sad, glad, and afraid) and discussed with another, thus ending a need to act them out.
- **“Mistakes Happen (You Only Need To Be “Good Enough”):”** Perfection is impossible in parenting. In fact, it isn’t even recommended. A child who knows that everyone in the family makes mistakes, and that they will eventually be worked out, will feel more secure than a child who thinks everything has to be right the first time.
- **Be Bigger, Stronger, Wiser, and Kind:** At the heart of secure attachment is a child’s recognition that s/he has a parent who can be counted on to lovingly provide tenderness, comfort, firm guidance and protection during the inevitable difficulties of life. If the truth be told, all of us have this need some of the time, no matter what our age.