

Eyes on



Parent-child attachment

A bond of trust



PARENTS



Centre of Excellence
for Early Childhood
Development

STRATEGIC KNOWLEDGE
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child development



“Attachment is the emotional bond between you and your baby.”

What do we know?

- Attachment is the emotional bond between you and your baby.
- Your baby cannot speak, but he still has ways to let you know how he’s feeling. If you pay attention to these signs and act on them to comfort your baby, you will form a bond of trust with him.
- For example, your baby may cry when he is sick, tired or afraid. This is his way of letting you know that he wants to be comforted.
- When you pay attention to your baby’s crying and comfort him in these situations, he learns that you can protect him. He comes to know that you will act in a predictable and caring way when he needs you. This makes him feel more trusting and more secure with you.
- You can see that your child has a strong bond of trust with you when he is happy around you and when he actively wants to be with you (for example, he smiles at you, wants to play and cuddle with you).
- If your child grows up trusting you, he learns to trust other people in different situations.
- When your child feels trusting and secure he is more likely to become independent. He is able to face the regular challenges of childhood (such as starting day care or making new friends) and other difficult situations.
- If your child is trusting and secure, he is better able to control the way he reacts in situations that he finds scary or stressful. Being able to control his feelings is an important part of emotional and cognitive development.
- Parents can be stressed due to problems with their couple, health or finances. When they are stressed and also don’t have much support or good bonding experiences of their own, they can find it hard to respond to their children in predictable and caring ways.
- If parents find themselves in this situation often or for long periods of time, they may not be able to form a strong bond of trust with their child. This can lead to problems for the child, such as negative social behaviours (e.g., aggression) or psychological difficulties.

Paying attention to...

What can be done?

... your baby's crying or other signs of discomfort, worry or distress. These are your baby's ways of letting you know he is not doing well and that he needs your comfort.

- Comfort your baby by responding quickly to any signs of discomfort or distress. For example, be loving and caring, speak softly, and hold your baby in your arms.
- Set up a care routine that is always the same (for example, baths and meals at fixed times, bedtime routines). This helps your child to learn to expect these events. It also helps you to keep the family organized.
- Take a few minutes to hold your baby in your arms to "talk" and interact with him. This is a great way for you to get to know your baby.

... the games your child likes to play and to signs that your child wants you to play with him.

- Be aware of your child's play. Imitate what he does. Let your child lead the way.
- Offer some new ideas that might be fun. If he's getting frustrated, suggest solutions and congratulate him for his efforts.
- Plan time to play with your child without being in a hurry. Try not to think about other things that need to be done.
- Pay attention to signs that your child is getting tired of the game. Let him stop the game if he's getting tired or bored.

... your own signs of fatigue, stress and discouragement.

- Give yourself specific time to rest.
- Share your child's care with your partner whenever possible. Get help from friends and family when you need it.
- Find services in your community that can help (for example, babysitting networks, help with housekeeping, parents' support groups or counselling services).



Information

This Key Message is a publication of the Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development (CEECD) and the Strategic Knowledge Cluster on Early Child Development (SKC-ECD). These organizations identify and summarize the best scientific work on early childhood development. They disseminate this knowledge to a variety of audiences in formats and languages adapted to their needs.

For a more in-depth understanding of Attachment, consult our synthesis and experts' articles on this topic in the Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development, available free of charge at www.child-encyclopedia.com.

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In this document, the masculine form is used merely to simplify the text. No discrimination is intended.

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