

Healthy Attachments Begin with an Adult Who Shows Unconditional Love

The old saying “tied to your mother’s apron strings” sometimes has a negative connotation because it implies that a child has a lack of independence from his mother. This may be a valid impression with an older child, but for a newborn, to be “tied” or attached to its mother is his most important emotional and physical need. If a baby is to survive he needs protection and nurturing for birth.

As social beings we value relationships. These attachment feelings are intense and important, these feelings of closeness and responsiveness, wanting to be with one another and falling in love. The parent/infant attachment is based on this interaction and mutual attention and so requires, first and foremost, time together.

Initially the primary attachment figure is the mother but today infants are becoming more and more attachment to fathers as parenting is shared. As the attachment grows, the infant feels more confident, secure, and trusting towards the bigger world and he learns to value himself and others. Attachment is a commitment of belonging that continues to grow throughout life through shared experiences.

Every baby needs a warm, intimate relationship with a primary caregiver over a period of years, not weeks or months. Doctors T. Berry Brazelton and Stanley Greenspan describe this need as one of the seven “irreducible needs” that provide the fundamental building blocks for emotional, social, and intellectual abilities. They go on to say “ongoing nurturing relationships [are]...far more important to emotional and intellectual development than early cognitive training or educational games.” In other words, talking to and holding baby is more important than “teaching” academic skills. And if this relationship is absent or interrupted, a child can develop disorders of reasoning, motivation, and attachment. When there are secure, empathetic nurturing relationships, children learn to be intimate and empathetic, and eventually to communicate their own feelings, reflect on their own wishes, and develop their own relationships with peers and adults.

Unconditional love does not mean allowing a child full reign in the home or not setting limits. On the contrary, setting limits and teaching acceptable behavior in a loving way is paramount to helping a child learn self control in a respectful way. Loving, respectful parenting produces loving, respectful children who get along in the world in a loving, respectful way.

Things to do with baby to enhance attachment:

- Hold and cuddle
- Let child touch your face
- Play peek-a-boo
- Play imitation games
- Accept the child’s attachment to blanket or teddy.
- Keep a routine
- Share laughter, singing, and playing together
- Plan ahead to avoid fear, frustration, or exhaustion

Ways to Show Kids You Care

- Notice them
- Smile a lot
- Look into their eyes when you talk to them
- Play with them

- Giggle together
- Be nice
- Be honest
- Listen to their stories
- Hug them
- Be yourself
- Notice when they are acting differently
- Give them space when they need it
- Trust them
- Laugh at their jokes
- Kneel, squat, or sit at their eye level
- Thank them
- Ask for their opinion
- Let them know how you feel
- Be excited when you see them
- Be happy