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A safe relationship – a foundation for a lifetime

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What is the bond between a parent and a child?

There are important people in everyone's life who make us feel safe and thanks to whom we can explore the world. This sense of security enables us to build relationships also with other people more easily.

The secure parent-child bond, also known as attachment, is a relationship based on the physical and emotional availability of the parents. It develops from the first days of a child's life. Usually, the first person the child bonds with is the parent who spends the most time with the child and is therefore more likely to respond to the child's signals. This person is usually a mother.

Most children, by the age of one, are ready to build bonds also with other people who are important for them – other parent, siblings. The basis for forming new ties is the attentiveness and care shown by these people, expressed in responding to the child's needs and providing them with a sense of emotional security.

The type of relationship, the child's reactions and behaviour are subject to change throughout life, but the first three years are the most important for the child's development. It is during this period that the child's nervous system and brain develop

intensively. Maintaining a secure bond plays a very significant role here – it sets the correct paths for its development. Attentive and patient responses to the child's needs enable it to develop properly, which will result in healthy social relationships in the future.

Why is this so crucial?

Today's knowledge about attachment confirms that there is a correlation between the quality of these early experiences with the primary caregiver and the child's later functioning in adulthood. It is from these early experiences that the child learns to understand and explore the world.

The readiness of the baby and the parent to make a bond

From birth, both the infant and the parent/carer are ready to bond. Sensitivity to the baby's signals, cuddling, responding to the baby's cries, adjusting the tone of voice when the parent/carer speaks to the baby – all these elements contribute to creating the right conditions for bonding with the baby.

The child, for its part, also takes numerous actions to develop closeness with the adult: it maintains eye contact, clings when you hug her/him, grabs his/her clothes and holds onto them, turns its head towards an approaching voice, cries.

The first months of a child's life are a time when the infant expresses its needs through many signals sent to adults. During this early period, the role of the parent/carer is not only to read these signals carefully, but also to respond to them sensitively and patiently. This is a vital time when the infant learns to trust the world and the environment. Through these first experiences, the infant has the opportunity to learn patience and to wait calmly for its needs to be met.

Attachment model based on a sense of security

The child with a secure attachment model actively seeks closeness and contact with the caregiver and openly communicates its feelings, tension and perceived discomfort. When it experiences reassurance, it becomes calm and eager to return to playing and exploring its surroundings. This attachment model develops when each time and consistently a significant person responds to the child's signalled needs in a gentle, sensitive way.

The child feels safe in the presence of its nearest carer. In the event of separation, it may be unhappy and show it. However, it has the reassurance that its parent/carer will return. When the child is frightened, it seeks solace in its parent/carer. It knows that it is they who will provide comfort and consolation. Children characterised by a secure attachment model will be open-minded, they will trust themselves and, through this, other people. In case of setbacks, they will know how and where to look for help for themselves.



When the bond is not secure...

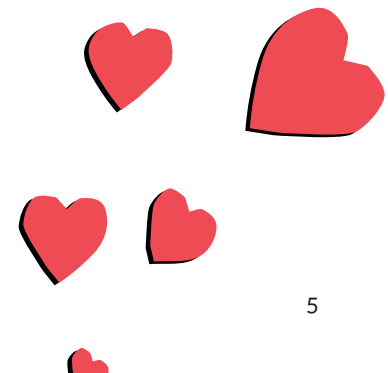
Sometimes there are factors that negatively affect the bonding process, causing a secure bond between the child and their parent/carer that will not develop.

Sometimes the difficulties of parenting, one's own childhood experiences, stress or fatigue mean that parents are not always able to build a relationship with their child in such a way as to keep it exclusively secure, calm and happy. The child who develops a non-secure attachment style from the very beginning will have a less stable basis for development, may show less trust towards people and the environment, may be less curious about the world and may cope less well with stress.

Caring for and dealing with a newborn baby can be tiring and difficult. Young parents can feel exhausted and overtired, devoting every moment to their child. However, if after a few weeks, the parent/carer does not feel closeness with the baby, but only exhaustion and discouragement – this is a signal that it is time to talk to someone about it, such as someone you trust or a professional.

A secure bond will give your child strength for life. It is important to provide it from the first year of life!

Establishing a secure relationship with your child is encouraged through play from the very first days. Below you will find some ideas for spending time together with your baby.



First quarter



4 weeks

The baby's basic skills – innate reflexes: suckling, grasping the nipple, swallowing – allow it to satisfy the essential needs for survival. During this period, the physical contact between mother and baby is very significant. The closeness and warmth of her body help to bear the discomfort.

What to do?

At this stage you can play with your baby without toys. It will find most pleasure in physical contact with you – cuddling, stroking, gently massaging. Your baby will calm down when you speak to it in a calm, quiet voice. You can also sing to it. If you accompany your singing with gentle rocking, as well as giving your baby pleasure, you will also strengthen its sense of rhythm.

2nd month

The child becomes animated when interacting with an adult. Calms down under the influence of caressing, affectionate speech. Begins to follow objects with its eyes. It lifts its neck when lying on its tummy. Around the 6th week the grasp reflex disappears – the baby's fingers are no longer clenched so tightly. Around the 8th week, on the other hand, the hands are fully open and relaxed and the baby is aware of them.

What to do?

Talk to your child, respond with a smile to its smile. Face-to-face contact and imitation are the best ways to spend time with it. The child then feels a sense of unity with you, which allows it to safely explore an increasingly interesting world. It gains the courage to move away later. You can help it to become aware of its little fingers and toes by massaging, tickling, touching, and rubbing them. Once the grasp reflex has disappeared, you can pass objects to the baby – you will make it easier for it to grasp if you place objects crosswise on its hand, i.e. along the folds of the hand. You can also hang toys above the cot or move a rattle around with the baby.





Second quarter

The child is increasingly active – becomes animated at the sight of carers, stretches out its hands. It not only reacts to the sight of a human face, but also smiles at others on its own. During this time, the functions of its nervous system are slowly maturing – memory, cognition, motor skills and eye-hand coordination.

4. month

The baby has more control over its hands and feet, can move them at the same time, straighten its legs and hold them up, shake a rattle. The baby gets to know the world with all its senses. Lying on its belly, it lifts up its upper body and pushes off the ground with its legs. Begins first attempts to sit with support.

What to do?

Accompany your child at times when it is experiencing tension. Face-to-face contact and closeness help it to cope with its difficulties. Playing imitation games, face-to-face contact and smiling together also reinforce the child's pleasant feelings, give it a lot of joy and show it that it is important to you. In this way, you teach it to build an emotional bond with another person – this important skill will be essential throughout its life.

Hand it a rattle and show joy to your child when it manages to shake it or when it 'taps' on a toy that starts to play. In this way you teach it that it can have an effect on different things. If you frequently show it a toy, it will begin to distinguish it from other toys. By doing so, it exercises its memory. Encourage your child to explore the surroundings and suggest interesting toys to it.

It is good for them to have different colours, textures, to be varied to the touch and to make different sounds, such as rustling. Not without a reason, a long, rustling tag is often the most attractive toy for children.

5. month

The baby can sit for a long time supported, but also for a short time unsupported. The child grasps larger objects with both hands, looks at them, turns them, smells them, licks them – all senses are involved in exploring the world. The toddler is comfortable holding and manipulating smaller objects. The baby can turn from back to stomach and hold and drink from a bottle.

What to do?

You can play with your baby in the giving and taking game. Give it a toy and then, gently bending its fingers, take it away. Give your baby something it can squish, such as paper. This will be a lot of fun and will allow it to practise coordination and hand strength. Bath time games – splashing, splattering, squeezing sponge or rubber toys – are very attractive to babies. You can also try giving your baby a bottle to hold on to on its own.

Your child really enjoys looking at you, at its reflection in the mirror, and at everything that goes into it. It brings it a lot of joy.

6. month

The baby can already sit without support. It rolls, crawls, i.e. moves with arms and legs. The child reaches for objects, tries to move them from hand to hand. When another child appears in the environment, it observes and smiles at it. Babbling appears, i.e. repeating sounds heard from the environment – grunting, snorting, repeating syllables: 'ma-ma', 'ba-ba', 'ta-ta'. With simple activities the child begins to notice cause and effect.

What to do?

Give your child objects that it can move from hand to hand. A ball is a fascinating object for a child. It likes to watch it roll, push it, roll it, throw it. When the ball is rolling, you can tell your child what it is doing. If you repeat this, the child will begin to see its influence in making the ball move. This will be a very valuable observation for it. You can play games with your child – rhymes, tell it short, simple, rhythmical rhymes. By doing so, you encourage it to repeat the sounds.

Games like 'Little Miss Muffet', 'Itsy Bitsy Spider' or clapping put the child in a good mood. As well as being fun, they enrich the baby's knowledge of its own body and develop the ability to consciously control its movements.

Second half of the year

With the skills learned, the child begins to intentionally involve others in being together. It learns that its behaviour influences the activities of those closest to it. It often initiates play on its own. The toys thrown are meant to be an incentive to spend time together and play, but they are also a test of what the child can afford to do in relation to carers. Crawling, and by the end of this period often mastering the art of walking, allows the child to follow and control proximity to a close person. The caregiver – the mother – becomes a safe base for the child to explore the world – moving away from her and returning to check that it is safe. During this period, much more of the child's attention is directed towards the outside world.

What to do?

In and out of play, it is important that you protest when your child does something you don't agree with. It helps it to understand the rules it has to follow.

You can give the child objects with which it can practise its finger grasping, e.g. books to practise turning the pages, crayons for scribbling on paper. Blocks can also be used for finger training. Make towers together with your child. Also show him that the blocks are of different sizes by placing

them next to each other, one on top of the other. This way you can help him to see the differences. It will probably be a lot of fun for your child to demolish the block constructions. If you give the message in this situation: 'Oh, it fell over!', you will be drawing the child's attention to the causes and consequences of its behaviour.

When your baby is sitting, place the toy just out of reach of its hands. This will encourage it to lean forward or sideways to reach for it. In this way you are practising its balance skills.

It is also a lot of fun for your child to crumple up a piece of paper. Now it can also tear it up and, if you don't mind a mess, this can be great exercise for it. You can gradually develop your baby's finger dexterity more and more. By picking up scraps of paper or other smaller items with you, it practises grasping with two fingers – thumb and forefinger.

Give your child a mirror and say their name. Emphasise that it sees itself. In doing so, you help the child to define himself.

'Noisy' toys are very attractive to the child. Children love to bang them and make them make sounds. This is why children are so fond of playing with kitchen lids, pots and spoons. They are also very interested in transparent containers with, for example, beans, groats or peas in them. Not only do they make a lot of noise, but you can also see what's inside.

You can ask the child different things, such as 'Where is the doll?'. The child learns to distinguish its toys and will find the doll if it has been placed somewhere in front of it. So let your child peek when you hide an object of its in play. Playing hide and seek allows your child to practise his memory.



You can also ask your child for an object it is holding in its hand. If the baby gives it to you, thank it and praise it for getting your request right. You can start practising with your child putting in and taking out different objects from containers.

Your child also loves reading. You can introduce a ritual of reading a story before bedtime. This gives your child great pleasure and also allows it to learn new words and sounds. It will be useful to it in its speech learning.

Let your child throw, e.g. a ball in the park. Let him throw it to you – this teaches it how to hit the target, but also develops its physical fitness and motor coordination.

Your child loves to imitate you. Take advantage of this. Show it your nose and say: 'This is Mummy's/Daddy's nose', then show its nose and say 'This is Johnny's nose'. Repeat this a few times and ask your child to show your nose and then its nose.

Try walking with your child by the hand. Remember to adjust the pace and size of the steps. If you want to make it easier for it to walk on its own, buy a stable, upright toy that it can hold on to, and by pushing it in front of itself, the baby will slowly gain more and more confidence.

Provide your child with cards and crayons. Let it create colourful shapes with passion. Make sure the crayons are not sharp – candle crayons are best, as they are soft enough not to hurt your child.

Remember, never shout at your child or hit it when it fails, destroys or breaks something. Also know that a toddler at this age likes to repeat different activities many times and, unlike an adult, is not bored by it.





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