

SECURE ATTACHMENT

These attachment bonds are formed when you respond to the needs of your child and dependably provide comfort.

When children experience this type of reliable behavior and connection, they are then free to learn and develop without having to use energy to survive or to remain hyper-vigilant.

We are all born with the innate drive to connect and when that connection is reliably established and repairs are made in response to ruptures, then the brain can grow in an optimal way.

We learn to become who we are and even to know who we are by how we experience being in connection with our attachment figure.

The attachment process is interactive and dynamic. Both you and your baby participate in an exchange of nonverbal emotional cues that make your baby feel understood and safe. Even in the first days of life, your baby picks up on your emotional cues, your tone of voice, gestures, and emotions. They send you signals by crying, cooing, and mimicking facial expressions. You watch and listen to their cries and sounds and respond to their cues. Secure attachment grows out of the success of this nonverbal communication.

WHAT ATTACHMENT IS NOT

Attachment is not constantly being with your baby.

Secure attachment doesn't happen by always holding them, or wearing them or sleeping with them. It's not about being literally attached.

And no matter your situation and your timeline for how long you can solely be there for your baby. These are the FACTS that form secure attachment.

Have a single primary, regular caregiver for the baby's first six months. Someone who can provide consistent and affectionate care. One caregiver produces a more securely attached child than a patchwork of people consisting of half of mom, some of dad and a series of babysitters to fill in the gaps.

Keep synchronized routines for eating, sleeping, and stimulation, especially during a baby's first few months. Adjust baby's feeding and sleeping schedules according to the baby's rhythms.

Regularly smile, touch, and show affection to your baby.

Act consistently in response to your baby's distress with comfort and warmth. The key word is consistently. You don't need to smother them which can hamper their independence and inhibits the process of learning to self-soothe.

So not *instantly* to every gurgle or noise.

Have a two-way, mutual relationship with your baby; not one dominated by your needs and moods. Go along with the interactions that are initiated by your baby.

The most important thing you can do as a parent is be aware of the significance of touch, attention, consistency and your own physical and mental health, especially during your child's first year.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE PERFECT

You don't have to be perfect all of the time in order to bond with your baby. Just do your best and don't worry if you don't always know what your baby wants. What makes attachment secure, is the quality and responsiveness and a willingness to notice and repair a missed signal.

You need to understand your baby's cues half of the time, not every time. As long as you notice when you have missed a cue and continue trying to figure out what they need, the secure attachment process stays on track.

SAFETY

It is the foundation of life. Our nervous system's job is to constantly scan if we are safe or not and tell the rest of our body how to act.

Safety is what every nervous system needs to be in a regulated state.

If a child doesn't feel safe they'll remain in a heightened state of alertness to watch for threats and to try to stay safe on their own. They spend their energy being hyper-vigilant.

This means DO NO HARM and REPAIR.

The sooner they feel safe the quicker the relationship can grow and deepen again. This communicates that ruptures happen, but they won't lose your love and that you are still there for them.

REPAIR

Let them know or feel felt and understood.

Stay open and curious to try to make sense of what might be going on inside for them.

Respond in a timely and effective manner.

Helping them feel seen is about more than just being present physically.

This is essentially how they come to experience the emotional sensation not only of belonging, of feeling felt, but also of being known.

When you give them the experience of being seen, they can learn how to see themselves with clarity and honesty. When you know them in a direct and truthful way, they learn to know themselves that way too.

You need to be able to see them as who they are actually becoming. Not who you would like them to be and not filtered through your own fears or desires.

The more fully you can see them, the more lovingly you can respond.

SECURITY

Providing security for them means over time they will depend on you less for it. You are teaching through co-regulation to eventually be able to self-regulate.

Their security will become established as an overall mental model of their identity and they'll have the internal resources to keep themselves safe, to see themselves as worthy, and to soothe themselves when things go wrong.

As a result a child develops a generalization based on repeated experiences that says my inner life is worthy of being seen. Not entitled, just a solid sense of inner worth.

The knowing that they are good and worthy. That's security.

Security brings with it a sense of empowerment. They believe that they can protect themselves, they're worthy of protection and that they seek out safety when they need it.

WHEN A CHILD DOESN'T FEEL SEEN

It can be because you see them through a lens that has more to do with your own fears and issues. That fixed filter can make it hard to make sense of and then respond in an attuned manner.

If you are set on a label or behavior you can come to define them. When you do this, you prevent yourself from releasing them in the totality of who they are.

You should avoid making judgments and putting a label on them. You need to consider what is going on beneath the behavior.

Labels will only create their self belief around it and how they think you see them. Simply see them. Notice what they're experiencing, then be there for and with them.

When they feel felt, they feel authentically known by you. This is how seeing your child sets the foundation for future relationships where they can be an individual who is also part of the connection.

THE FULLNESS OF WHO THEY ARE

Truly seeing your child establishes security. They feel embraced for who they are, both the good and the bad. You want them to know you want to know all parts of them, even when those parts aren't always pleasant.

How do you give them that message?

In your responses to how they feel or act.

Every interaction sends a message.

You give them cues as to how you feel. They know what you're feeling, whether you explicitly say it or not. Nervous systems read nervous systems.

They gain emotional security by also learning how to make sense of experiences with your help.

This starts when they are babies.

Your baby will look to you to know how to respond.

Should I be scared right now? Am I safe?

And based on how you react, they learn how to gauge their own reaction, both in behavior and how emotions are shaped and expressed.

This interaction is called social referencing and it represents the very beginning of their development into an emotionally aware human.

They see you.

What you communicate can inhibit them from exploring in developmentally healthy ways.

You are helping them feel free to share their feelings, even the big ones that might feel overwhelming. They internalize the messages you send.

If you tell them or give them the feeling that you don't want to hear from them, that would become part of what they know about the relationship with you.

SEEN VS SHAME

This can happen so indirectly and unintentionally.

You can make them feel like something is wrong with them, when they are simply being themselves and expressing their needs for connection.

Shame can remain with us long past childhood and shape how we function as adults, even if we're not aware that shame is a part of how our lives are being organized.

Shaming discourages them from showing you their true selves.

Shame doesn't even produce the behavior you are looking for, or if it does, the child behaves as you want on the outside, but does so with fear and rejection on the inside.

HELP THEM FEEL SEEN

Stay curious.

Slow down and just observe them.

Dive deeper beneath the actions and behavior. Below what seems obvious.

Look beyond your initial assumptions and interpretations.

No judgment.

What they do is part of an instinctual drive to learn and explore.

Chase the why.

Is it that they won't behave or they can't?!

Make space.

Take time to look and learn.

Simply to be present.

Create time to know them better and understand them at a deeper level, so you can help them grow into the fullness of who they are.

HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

Boundaries are first learned in the earliest relationships. They are taught and negotiated by the way you relate to them.

Toddlers start testing boundaries. They will push away from you from being held, using their healthy aggression to take up space. They will also do this by checking in internally before deciding whether they want to hug someone for example.

When you try to sway them away from what they're doing or trying, they're left feeling confused, doubting their truth and becoming acutely attuned to what you do or don't want, to avoid shame.

Be so careful to not condition them from listening to their intuition.

Let's not crawl over the puppy, you may hurt her. Which keeps their self-esteem intact.

Instead of why are you being a bad girl and hurting your puppy? Which leaves the child feeling as if they are innately bad.

MYTHS AND FACTS

MYTH: My baby is attached to me because I gave birth to them.

FACT: They have independent nervous systems that may be different from yours. What makes you feel good may not be the same thing that makes your baby feel good. So you have to look and listen to their emotional cues, so you can understand their individual needs.

MYTH: Secure attachment and love are the same thing.

FACT: Bonding and attachment happen instinctively between mothers and babies, but, unfortunately, loving them doesn't automatically result in secure attachment. Secure attachment develops from your ability to manage your stress, respond to their cues and successfully soothe them.

MYTH: I am having a hard time reading my baby's signs and I can't always figure out what they want, so they must not be securely attached.

FACT: It is not possible or necessary to understand their emotional needs all the time in order to develop a secure attachment. As long as you recognize the disconnect and attempt a repair, the relationship will stay strong and may even grow stronger as a result of repairing the disconnect.

MYTH: Always responding to their needs makes babies spoiled.

FACT: The more responsive you are to their needs, the less “spoiled” the baby will become as they get older. Bonding creates trust and children with secure attachments tend to be more independent, not less.

MYTH: Babies can have a secure attachment bond with more than one person.

FACT: Babies form a secure attachment with only one person. The person who spends the most time caring for them. However, they can bond or connect in a loving way with all the people who take care of them.

MYTH: Secure attachment is a one-way process that focuses on accurately reading my baby's cues.

FACT: Attachment is a two-way, interactive process in which they read your cues as you read theirs.