

# PLAY IS THE WORK OF CHILDHOOD

Your baby needs a safe place to play so they can touch all the objects within their reach.

If they're being told no all the time, their concentration will be broken. If they have an open, clear space they play with a simple object. They can learn how to grab it, crumble it, drop it, and reach for it again.

They don't get bored with an activity, even if you do. While this is going on, your job is to just watch, to follow their gaze but not to direct it.

They can become overwhelmed with too much choice. With too many toys, they're more likely to go from activity to activity rather than engage deeply with one.

Having more toys is not going to make them need you less. It'll probably cause the opposite because they'll become dysregulated and unable to play alone.

A child who is concentrating on an activity must not be interrupted. They're at work! They absorb, concentrate, use their imagination, construct a narrative, their activity has a beginning, a middle and an end. And when allowed to repeat such a process as many times, they lay down a solid foundation for tasks and concentrating.

When they want you to play with them. Invest your time and energy at the beginning. Play is a time to let them take the lead, to decide on an activity. Start to play and gradually back off. It's easier for you and nicer for them if you play with them first. If you tell them you're too busy, they're likely to continually interrupt.

Once a child has started playing and is content, they can continue to play without having to check on you or keep you engaged. You've filled attachment.

You have to put the time in anyway. Invested positively at the beginning, you're less likely to have to invest it negatively later.

Purposeful play focuses on building attachment by attending to needs, creating safety, allowing exploration and providing attunement to their feelings and experiences. Having a scheduled time for play that focuses on these benefits is helpful.

During times of play, maintaining eye contact, initiating physical touch and verbalizing words of encouragement enhance the experience.

## **COPY CAT**

Playfully copy what they're doing.

Imitate them.

Mirror their movements, noises, and facial expressions.

Eye contact, smiles and laughs promote a healthy relationship and repair or enhance attachment.

## **MIRROR TIME**

Look in a mirror together. You can also copy what they're doing.

## **MASSAGE**

Massaging their hands or feet is a good start.

It builds attachment while also reducing tension, relaxing their bodies and bringing the nervous system into a regulated state.

If you do this frequently as a baby, it will take just a moment of touch to help them relax and calm down as they get older.

Don't wait until they're fussy to give a massage. Set aside time before or after a bath or during diaper changes.

## **KISSES**

Kissing is an intimate activity and a sign of affection that can help promote attachment.

Apply different pressures of kisses.

Butterfly: flutter your eyelashes opened and closed on their skin.

## **COTTON BALL SOOTHE**

Gently touch them with a cotton ball around their facial features. You can comment on their uniqueness. Look into their eyes and lovingly describe their beautiful attributes.

## **OUTLINE**

Trace your finger or hands gently around their body or hands or feet.

## **LAP GAMES**

Games like peek-a-boo and patty-cake and this little piggy.

## **LOOK AT THEM WHILE YOU ARE FEEDING**

Looking at them promotes attachment, but it also helps them develop their own sense of identity. When you look into their eyes during a feeding, there is prolonged, intimate contact while being in your arms, or skin-to-skin contact if you are nursing. When you change sides you offer a different view of you and help them develop both sides of their brain and body.

## **TALK TO THEM WHEN YOU ARE OUT OF SIGHT**

They can become scared when they can't see you, which causes alarm in their body. If you start early, you can help alleviate this fear.

As you're leaving the room, talk to them about what you're doing or where you're going. You don't need to speak loudly or keep your voice going the entire time, but just hearing your voice is a reassuring reminder that you aren't far away.

(Attachment) In time, they'll gain the sense that all is still well when you leave the room and there's no need to fear.