



Building a Secure Attachment with Your Child

If you were told there was one thing that you could do for your child that would:

- increase her self-esteem
- help her performance in school
- help her to have positive relationships with others all through life
- help her to handle stress and
- help her to some day raise her own healthy, happy children,

would you do it? Most parents would reply, "Of course I would do that for my child.!"

What is this powerful force that can be so valuable in a child's life? **It is a SECURE ATTACHMENT.**



To become securely attached, children need a dependable adult who responds to their needs.

Children who are securely attached use this special adult as their base of security. When children feel secure,

they can move away from their dependable adult to explore, knowing they can always go back to that adult as needed. It's through exploring that children learn.

When children with secure attachments are frustrated, overwhelmed or upset, they know they can go to their special adult to be comforted, and then are able to return to exploring and learning. This becomes a positive cycle, with the child taking risks by exploring new things, learning from those experiences, and gaining confidence in the process.

Children who don't have secure attachments spend less time exploring, making it harder for them to learn. If a dependable adult isn't present it's difficult for a child to trust that her needs will be met and she learns that she isn't important.



Attachment Tip

Make up a goodbye ritual. A special noisy kiss or a bear hug or a wave from the window. Children are reassured by the routine, and find it comforting when you leave them at child care.

What can you do?

You can help your child to make a secure attachment by being dependable and responsive. That means tuning in to your child's signals that he is hungry or tired, and providing comfort and relief when he needs it. You might have seen articles and books that say the right way to parent is to carry your baby in a sling, nurse him throughout the early years and sleep together in a family bed. These things can help you to be in touch with your child's needs, and nursing certainly benefits your child's health, but you can have a secure attachment with your child without doing any of these things. The secret is in your ability to listen and respond to your child's needs.

Your role is to be in tune with your child and to let him set the pace for exploring. Your child needs to be able to trust that you will be there when he needs security and comfort.



Attachment Tip

Take some time to help your child adjust to child care. Go in and visit before you start, and plan some time so that you don't need to leave right away during those first weeks. Let your child use you as a secure base while exploring. Give comfort, but let the child set his or her own pace.

Parents who are depressed often have problems making a secure attachment with their child because it's more difficult for them to tune in and respond to their child's needs. This means that their child's efforts to interact with them may be ignored, causing the child to stop using the behaviors that are needed to make good relationships. If you think you may be depressed it is very important to seek help for yourself. You will be better able to meet your child's needs once your depression is treated.

Parents who are clingy or fearful often discourage their child from exploring, which prevents the positive cycle of exploration and learning that is so important for a child's success in school and in relationships.

Get in Tune with Your Child

When you are sharing those special moments of talking, playing, reading or singing with your baby, you are attuned to her. Your baby is listening to you and you are listening to her. You share a laugh or a smile, and you lock eyes. Getting in tune with your child helps build a secure attachment with your child and helps your child's mind to grow. So enjoy a song or

play a game like rolling a ball back and forth or reading a book together. And most of all, talk with your child. The goal isn't to finish the book, to teach the child the motions in the game or the words to the song – the goal is to spend some time together and get in tune. It is the experience of being together that matters most.

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