

- Plan for uninterrupted play time with your baby or young child. Show interest in what your child is doing and saying.
- Organize your child's day. Routines make a child feel secure.

**What might make a child feel not worthy of love and attention, and interfere with a healthy attachment?**

When a child is upset, hurt, or sick, the parent:

- ignores, laughs, mocks, teases or gets angry at the child

The parent responds to the child in ways that are not sensitive or nurturing:

- rejecting or harsh responses
- responding sometimes but not at other times, or responding with anger sometimes and being caring at other times
- keeps stimulating the child when he shows he doesn't want any more

Inappropriate verbal or physical behaviours:

- often being angry or annoyed
- physically aggressive behaviours
- using a tone of voice or look on your face that gives a different message than your words (e.g., saying "I love you" in a harsh voice)

Often putting your own needs before your child's needs:

- demanding your child show you affection and/or threatening to cry if she does not
- sudden mood changes that are not related to your interaction with your child
- being rigid, inflexible

If you have questions or concerns, please call Access Mental Health at 403-943-1500 or your family doctor.

# Promoting Healthy Attachment in Young Children

---

*This material is for information purposes only. It should not be used in place of medical advice, instruction, and/or treatment. If you have questions, speak with your doctor or appropriate healthcare provider.*

## What is attachment?

Attachment is the sense of security you get from knowing you (as parents) are willing and able to offer comfort and safety.

Attachment gets stronger every time you respond to your child's cues, watch over and delight in his explorations, and comfort him when he needs you.

Your child's sense of security continues to develop with your loving care as he grows.

Two important parts of your child's attachment relationship are:

- your ability to provide a safe and secure environment
- your child's experiences with this secure environment. Positive experiences lead to feelings of trust.

Research suggests a strong link between attachment and long-term social and emotional adjustment.

A secure parent-child attachment is associated with a child's:

- ability to control his impulses and emotions
- development of positive social values, morals, and empathy
- building a solid sense of self

- success in managing stress and challenges
- ability to create and maintain emotional relationships

Your child's feelings about himself are affected by his experiences with you. Those experiences help him learn how you will usually respond when he is upset. They also affect how your child relates to other people later on.

The experiences your child has in the first two years of life are most important. They shape the way he reacts to stress and challenges:

- The child who is sure of an understanding and loving response, a response that tells him he is important and can depend on you, is secure.
- The child who is unsure of his parent's response is insecure.

An important parent response that helps to build healthy attachment is comforting the child who is:

- emotionally upset
- sick
- physically hurt

Comforting your child quickly at these times does not "spoil" him. It helps him learn to calm himself and makes him feel safe.

Sometimes it is hard to know why your child is crying. It may be hard to know what to do. However, you try to comfort him will give him the important message that you care.

## What can I do to help my child develop a healthy attachment?

- Understand your child's personality and adjust the way you parent.
- Provide a consistent, caring response.
- Try to understand what your child's is trying to tell you. Ask yourself, "What is she trying to tell me?", and act in a way that will meet her needs.
- Your young child may use sounds, words or actions, to tell you:
  - "I like what you're doing" (e.g., looking at your face, smiling, or looking relaxed)
  - "I don't like what you're doing" (e.g., turning away or crying)
  - "I need you right now" (e.g., crying or reaching for you)
- Make your interactions loving and fun.
- Cuddle, touch and have close physical contact. Talk to your child with a bright, warm tone of voice. Look into her eyes.