



Attachment Relationships

Babies need much more than just to have their physical needs for food and shelter fulfilled. Research shows that the relationships babies form with their parents and other carers are vitally important to their overall health, development and well-being.

Research shows that warm, sensitive, consistent, responsive and nurturing relationships provide the best possible foundation for development and learning.

What this means is that babies need relationships with their parents or carers who are tuned into their feelings, able to 'read' their cues (or ways of communicating) and then respond to them appropriately. Babies and young children need to be cared for physically and emotionally.

Attachment

'Attachment' is the term used to describe the above types of relationships between babies/children and their significant carers. Attachment is an emotional bond between two people, where there is an expectation of care and protection. Secure attachments nurture the development of emotional security and resilience, and promote the child's feelings of self-worth and competence.

Secure attachment also provides the baby and young child with a safe base to explore the world. The emotional security built through secure attachment relationships allows the baby to explore their environment and engage with other people positively. Therefore, these relationships are a foundation for mental and social development.

Some parents may worry that their baby or young child will form an attachment with another carer and that the relationship will threaten their own parent-baby bond. However, research shows that attachment relationships are not limited to the bond between a baby and their parent, but can relate to all significant carer relationships in the baby's life.

Most children form a network of attachment relationships with family and other carers. They need to know that there is at least one carer they can trust to consistently respond to their individual need for care and comfort, with warmth and sensitivity. This is especially important in infancy when development is rapid.

It is from their own relationships that every baby individually develops an understanding of how the world around them works. Is the world safe and ordered, or hostile and unpredictable? Are people reliable and supportive or, alternatively, are they erratic and antagonistic?

Attachment relationships also tell the baby and young child about how they are valued by others. Are my needs responded to appropriately? If I need emotional support, is this provided? Does someone understand and respond to my communications? Am I greeted with pleasure and joy? The answers to these questions tell the baby and young child how much they are valued; they are the material the baby uses to develop their own sense of self-worth. Overall, they answer a question that is fundamental to a child's development: am I loved and lovable?

If you would like to know more about attachment relationships, go to the Raising Children Network: www.raisingchildren.net.au

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