

Attachment/Relationships

What Are Attachment/Relationships?

Attachment/relationships are the caring connections that infants and toddlers are forming in the early years of life. These connections might be with a mother, father, grandparent, and other relatives or important caregivers. Healthy attachment and happy relationships go hand in hand to help form strong emotional bonds between infants or toddlers and the caring adults in their lives. Infants and toddlers who are building attachment/relationships tend to seek and maintain closeness to important people in their lives, particularly in stressful situations.

Why Are Attachment/Relationships Important?

When infants and toddlers have healthy attachment and strong relationships, they learn to trust that the world is safe, and they have confidence to explore



and learn. Here are some of the behaviors you may see in your infant or toddler that show she is building attachment/relationships:

- **Infant (4 weeks to 18 months)**
 - Seeks and accepts comfort from familiar adults
 - Shares smiles with familiar adults
 - Makes eye contact with others
 - Shows affection for a familiar adult and enjoys being cuddled
 - Responds when spoken to
- **Toddler (18 months to 36 months)**
 - In addition to the above,
 - Expresses a variety of emotions
 - Reaches for familiar adults
 - Acts happy when praised
 - Makes others aware of her needs
 - Shows interest in her surroundings
 - Responds to her name



Healthy Attachment and Strong Relationships Can Support Your Infant and Toddler For Now and Forever!

If Now...	Then Forever...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your infant coos and laughs when you smile at her. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> She will enjoy laughing and interacting with close friends.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your infant calms down when you hold her close and talk gently. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> She will be able to calm herself in safe and healthy ways when faced with stressful situations.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your toddler lets you know she needs help when something is difficult. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> She will know it is okay to ask for help, and she will offer help to others as well.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your toddler happily waves goodbye to you when you drop her off. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> She will develop a sense of trust that you will return because you said so.

Strategies to Support Attachment and Relationships

- **Hug and cuddle together.** Safe, loving touch can help you build a bond with your infant or toddler. When your infant looks at and smiles at you while crawling, you smile back. When your toddler runs to you for a hug, you respond. These actions tell your child that you think she is important. This can then help your child cope with events such as going to child care for the first time, visiting a new place, or meeting new people. Try to give your child warm hugs throughout the day. If your child does not enjoy hugs, use other ways to connect:
 - Give a gentle pat or rub on the back.
 - Hold hands.
 - Use a signal such as a wink or a thumbs-up.
 - Smile at each other.

- **Provide safety and security.** Gently touch or pick up your infant or toddler in the presence of unfamiliar adults to reassure her that she is safe. Stay close by as she plays and explores. Your child looks to you for reassurance. When you respond with a smile or a nod or by picking her up when needed, she learns you are reliable and trustworthy. In the future, this will help her to trust and care for others in her life, such as a pet, a sibling, or a friend.
- **Share and respond.** Pay attention to how your child says she is hungry, ready to play, or sleepy. Respond gently to these cues, and talk with other adults in your child's life to share these observations: *"Lee will start to fuss a little and kick her legs when she is ready to get down from your arms and play."* Your child's cues are her way of letting you know what she wants and needs. Respond quickly and gently so your child learns her needs are important.
- **Engage.** Use daily routines to interact with your infant or toddler. Coo, babble, and talk together during diaper changes and mealtimes. Share laughs as you play together on the floor. This everyday interaction not only helps your child's brain to grow and develop, she is also learning how to get along with others—sharing smiles, words, and gestures.
- **Support self-soothing.** Support your infant or toddler when she does things to calm herself: *"Alaina, you are holding your blanket, and you look sleepy. May I hold you?"* Later in life, your child will find ways to calm down in stressful situations. For example, she may find a quiet activity or seek out a friend to talk to.
- **Describe emotions.** Use your face, your tone of voice, and your words together to express emotions: *"Casey, you seem so happy. Look at my big smile. Your face is smiling, too!"* Even if your infant or toddler does not yet use many words, hearing you label how she feels will help her learn to express feelings in healthy and safe ways.


- **Redirect.** Gently guide your infant or toddler to a better choice when needed. Little ones often need redirection for their own safety. If an infant or toddler is moving toward something in the environment that is not safe, adults should remove the item or redirect the child to something more interesting. Infants and toddlers are curious. They seek to touch, taste, and smell almost everything! Keeping the environment safe is an important job.
- **Watch for clues.** Closely watch your baby to try to understand why she might be crying. For example, infants may cry when they are tired, hungry, bored, or upset. Try to describe for your child what you see and hear rather than telling her to stop: *“Tyler, you are arching your back and fussing, I think you are getting tired. Let’s get ready for a nap.”*
- **Use a gentle voice.** Speak calmly and gently to your infant or toddler throughout the day, and avoid using a loud or abrupt voice that can startle a young child. Children listen and learn about how to communicate with others from hearing our tone and words. Model kindness and patience in your voice.
- **Show your child how to make friends.** Infants and toddlers seem to hear and see everything that adults do! Children learn a lot about how to get along with others by watching us.
 - Practice saying *please* and *thank you* to those who help you each day.
 - Look at and gently touch those you love.
 - Show your child how to listen by paying attention and nodding your head when her teacher or care provider talks with you.



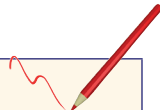


Thinking about Your Own Attachment/Relationships

Think about a healthy, loving relationship you have with someone in your life. Take a few minutes to think about that special person and what qualities he or she brings to the relationship. For example, is this person a good listener? Does the person make time for you? Write down the words that describe this person and what he or she does to make this relationship a good one:



Next, think about what this relationship brings to your life. What are the benefits? For example, this relationship might help you keep your sense of humor! List some of the other benefits this relationship brings to your life:



You probably said that people you love and care for tend to be good listeners, are trustworthy, and make you laugh. Having them in your life may help you feel a sense of security and well-being. This is exactly what we want to bring to our children's lives. Infants and toddlers need love, nurturing, and care to feel valued, to have a sense of security, and to be happy. If your child receives these things, she will be more able to accept loving relationships and will be able to be a good friend to others.