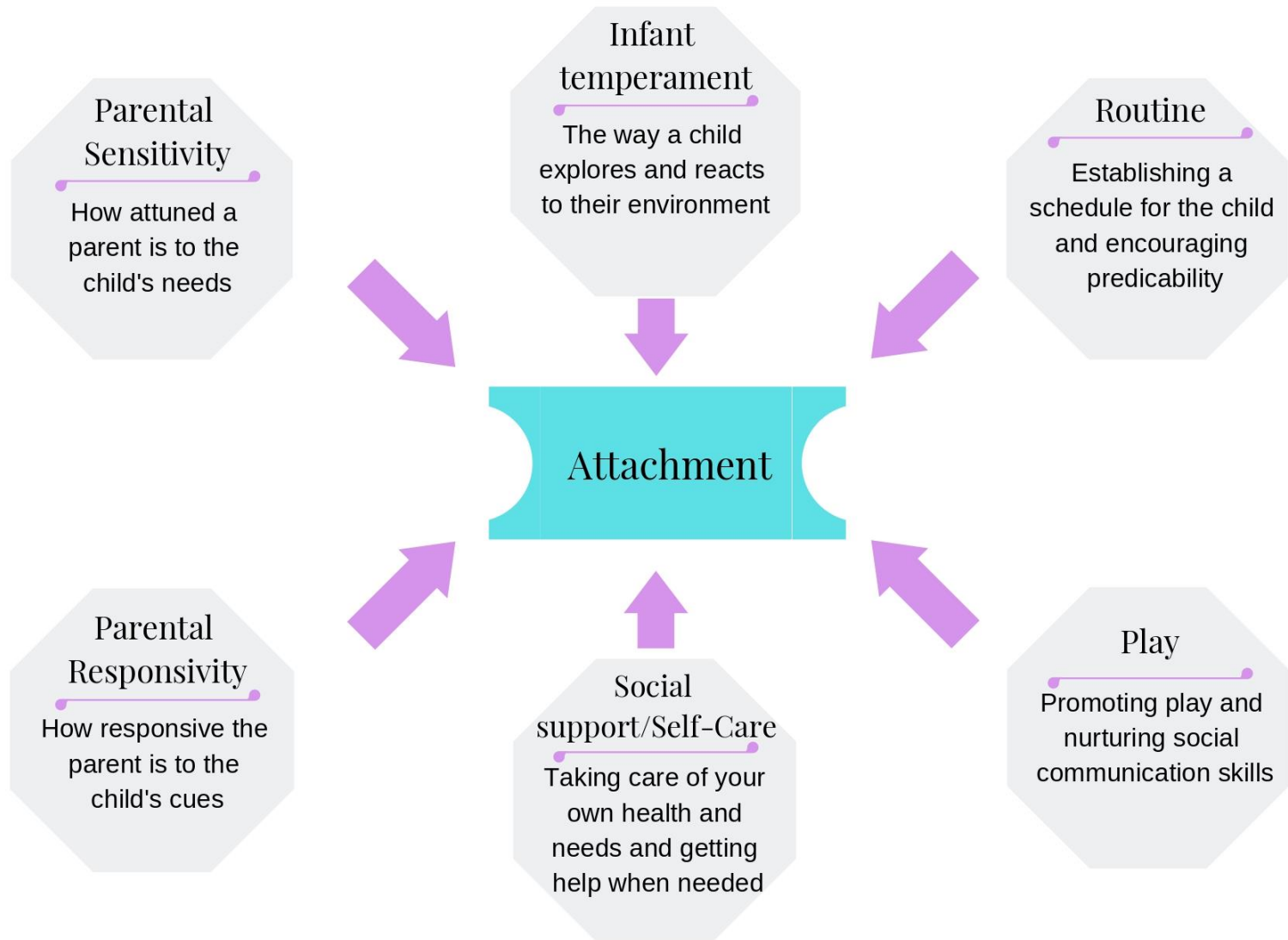


BUILDING BONDS





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Overview of Attachment

What is Attachment?

Attachment is the **primary emotional bond** that exists between the infant and the caregiver over a period of time. This bond serves as the platform where future human relationships and lifespan development are based upon. An infant's healthy attachment development promotes and lays foundation for self-organization (Bowlby, 1982) and managing feelings and behaviours (Lieberman & Van Horn, 2008). This allows the infant to explore the world without fear as well as adequately self-regulate (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters & Wall, 1978) itself during times of distress.

Attachment Styles

Organised

Disorganised



Insecure- Resistant

How the parent/caregiver responds to distress:

Organised but Inconsistent (Insensitive)

- Caregiver responds in inconsistent and unpredictable manner (response based on Caregiver's own mood) e.g. amplifying infant's distress, being overwhelming or underwhelming to the child during different situations

How the infant reacts to caregiver's response style:

- Infants tend to display extreme negative emotion: exaggerate displays of distress and anger
- Resistant responses, 'hoping' that the marked distress response won't be missed by the caregiver
- Increased risk in developing social and emotional maladjustment

How the parent/caregiver responds to distress:

Organised and Loving

- Caregivers consistently respond in 'sensitive' or 'loving' ways. e.g. picking the infant up promptly and reassuring the infant

How the infant reacts to caregiver's response style:

- Infants feel secure in their knowledge that they can freely express negative emotion which will elicit comfort from their caregiver
- They seek proximity to and maintain contact with the caregiver until they feel safe

Secure



Insecure - Avoidant

How the parent/caregiver responds to distress:

Organised but Rejecting (Insensitive)

- Caregivers respond by ignoring, ridiculing or becoming annoyed
- e.g. caregiver assumes that the child is crying on purpose to irritate them and doesn't attempt to comfort the child

How the infant reacts to caregiver's response style:

- Child pays less attention to caregiver and does not seek them even when distressed
- Responses to parent often appear unemotional
- Increases the risk for developing adjustment problems

How the parent/caregiver responds to distress:

Disorganised

- Caregiver behaviours, are not typical and sometimes referred to as "frightening, frightened, dissociated, sexualized or otherwise atypical"
- Such behaviours displayed during interactions are not limited to when the child is distressed

How the infant reacts to caregiver's response style:

- Child unable to cope easily or be comforted when stressed
- Child may display evidence of fear or confusion around a caregiver
- Dissociation becomes a preferred defence mechanism, which may lead to psychiatric problems later on



Outcomes of a Secure Attachment

At infancy

- ★ More explorative and curious
- ★ More independent
- ★ Have a sense of agency/
sense of self –awareness
that “I am a person”

At preschool/ elementary age

- ★ Better social skills, school
adjustment
- ★ More friendships, higher
peer acceptance
- ★ Higher empathy
- ★ More capable of reciprocity

At adolescence and higher

- ★ Better social
competence
- ★ More goal oriented and
cooperative, able to
perform better in
school
- ★ Higher self-esteem
- ★ Better peer
relationships

Myths and Facts about Attachment

Myth: My baby will grow up to be spoiled if I always respond to his/her cries.

Fact: Infants learn self-regulation when they are soothed by their caregivers. When caregivers respond to the child's distress, the child experiences a reduction in arousal and positive reinforcement, which helps to develop a sense of self-efficacy to regulate their emotions independently as they grow older.

Tips:

Sometimes, we might tend to observe what parents/caregivers do with their children and pass judgement on how they treat their children. Is there really one approach of parenting/caregiving that surpasses the rest? What if one parent/caregiver loves kissing and hugging his/her kids while another frequently prepares their sons/daughters favourite meals? Does that make one parent/caregiver better than others?

Caregiver responsivity refers to how the caregiver reacts to the child's distress or cues (Davidov & Grusec, 2006). This responsiveness is reported to be the most suitable estimate for secure infant attachment (Dunst & Kassow, 2008). However different parents may respond to their child's needs in different ways. Research has shown that some parents demonstrate less outward display of affection to their children while placing more emphasis on taking care of their daily needs (Cheah, Li, Zhou, Yamamoto & Leung, 2015). Hence you may have a different caregiving approach from your friend and that is ok. Knowing your child's cues and being there when they need you is the most important thing!

Myth: Forming attachment is a one-way process that depends on how I interact with the child.

Fact: Building a secure attachment is a two-way process that depends on how the child perceives the attention s/he receives as well.

Tips:

- a) Sensitive parenting behaviour happens when parents are able to consistently attune themselves or think about the emotions, thoughts needs and preferences that could provide an indication to the function of the infant's behaviour (Leerkes, Blankson & O'Brien, 2009). Being responsive to your infant's cues would mean that you are able to predict with relative consistency, which toy your infant prefers, which activities would over arouse or overwhelm your infant and when your infant needs a familiar and quiet environment. Unsurprisingly, parental sensitivity and responsiveness to the infant's needs and signals results in positive outcomes within health, social, emotional and academic success.
-



b) Playing between child and parent can be therapeutic for both parties. If the family is going through a stressful situation, the connection and bond between parent and child may be affected as the parent may be preoccupied. This may cause attachment to weaken as parent start to feel more burdened or are unable to find time to play with the child. Hence, the child may start to feel disconnected and lonely from the change in the parent's mood. Play can be a healing factor for both you and your child as laughter during play can help to reduce any tension in the relationship and the presence of anxious and frustrated feelings (Solter, 2013). Despite busy schedules, playing with your child for 15 to 30 minutes can help to strengthen the bond between you and your child. Playing is not only meant for children and adults can also find joy in it.


Myth: My child does not calm down regardless of how quick I respond to his/her cries, there must be something wrong with me.

Fact: Though parental responsiveness and how sensitive the caregiver is to the child's cues are important, child factors such as temperament can also play a part in how the child responds to the caregiver's attention.

Tips:

Temperament describes the way a child explores and reacts to the world around them, and this can be influenced by family values and parenting styles (Chess & Thomas, 1982). Temperament is classified into three categories. Modifying your responses appropriately to fit your child's temperamental needs will aid in developing a secure attachment (Vaughn et al., 1992).

Temperament	Characteristics	What Parents can do
Easy-going 	Tend to be happy, regular in habits, adaptable, not easily upset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They may require winding down time as they tend to be more physically active (i.e. providing them with bedtime relaxation activities such as reading a bedtime story together or practising deep breathing together). • If your child is comfortable being sociable and enjoys outdoor activities, remember to include sufficient activities that allow your child to be alone.
Feisty/difficult 	Tend to be fussy, irregular in habits, fearful of new people and situations, can have intense reactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When your child is angry/unhappy, model calm behaviours and help him/her learn how to respond calmly (i.e. using words to express unhappiness). • If your child finds it difficult to transit between activities, try positive ways to transit (i.e. playing a game to stop current activity and to move onto the next activity) and to reward/praise your child for being able to move from one activity to another without any trouble.

Temperament	Characteristics	What Parents can do
<p data-bbox="129 152 338 180">Slow to warm</p> 	<p data-bbox="378 152 600 482">Less active, reacts negatively to new situations and may require repeated exposure</p>	<ul data-bbox="679 152 1465 488" style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce physical activity in your daily routine with your child (i.e. walking to the supermarket instead of driving). • Give your child sufficient prompts about new routines or situations (i.e. keep a family calendar to note down outing plans and remind your child using the calendar about the planned activity to reduce their anxiety).

Myth: You should always put your child's needs above your own.

Fact: Self-care is essential - not just for the parent but also for the child's well-being.

Tips:

While you may inevitably feel the need to ensure that the needs of their children are met before tending to your own, this may not be healthy both for you and for the child! When self-care is neglected, parents are likely to find it even harder to cope with the stresses of family life. This may lead to poorer parenting styles (e.g. being more irritable, reactive and short-tempered). Furthermore, your children may also observe and pick up on any unhealthy behaviour and perceive self-care to be relatively unimportant.¹²³⁴

By putting your needs first, this helps to regulate your emotions, regain much-needed energy and feel refreshed before tackling your daily tasks. Self-care can be done through several ways, such as writing in a journal, catching up with friends, exercising, and taking regular, nutritious meals.

¹ <http://www.peps.org/ParentResources/by-topic/self-care/self-care-for-parents>

² <http://www.drstevesilvestro.com/parent-self-care-101-nancy-harazduk>

³ <https://www.parents.com/parenting/moms/healthy-mom/self-care-for-moms-why-its-important-to-make-it-a-priority/>

⁴ <https://www.scanva.org/support-for-parents/parent-resource-center-2/self-care-for-parents/>

Myth: Seeking help from others means that I'm a lousy parent.

Fact: Getting appropriate help from others can be a very valuable resource, and can even lead to better outcomes for you and your child.

Tips:

As a parent, you may find it uncomfortable, and even embarrassing, to seek help from friends, family members, or the community. You may feel that asking for help is an indication that you are not good enough to manage on your own, and that people may judge you for doing so. On the contrary, it takes plenty of courage to seek help, and in no way reflects whether you are a good parent or not.

In fact, getting help from others may likely lead to even better outcomes for both you and your child⁵. For instance, just talking about your anxieties and uncertainties with someone you trust can help alleviate your worries when navigating your parenting role. Other examples of seeking help may include joining parent support groups and playdate groups, where you can meet and befriend fellow parents, or engaging the help of babysitters or part-time help for the household.

⁵ <https://www.soberlink.com/parenting-the-importance-of-asking-for-help/>

Myth: Responding to children in a strict and authoritative manner is the only way to solve disciplinary problems.

Fact: Children can also learn rules through more positive ways that will also help you strengthen your attachment with them.

Tips:

Attachment play can help you set limits and resolve common disciplinary issues. Your child will be more willing to cooperate with you because they have a positive connection (Solter, 2013). They will also view the rules more positively rather than being spoiled by fun aspects of play. For example, while playing tea party with children, you can display appropriate table manners and ask them to replicate it. Hence, they will learn about these rules in a more positive and fun manner. This will help you manage your child without having to lecture them about rules.

Myth: This routine worked well for my older child. It should work just fine for my younger one.

Fact: When it comes to routines, parents may believe there is an ideal one that you should follow. There is no 'best' routine that suits every infant.

Tips:

A good routine should match the needs of the family and the infant, considering factors like the infant's temperament, age, and the mother's personality.

Before deciding how to respond to your child, observe your child and reflect on what he/she is attempting to share with you and what are his/her needs. One benefit of having a routine is that while giving parents a break from constantly being on their toes, routines are also comfort infants by adding some structure and predictability. However, do allow some room for flexibility in the routine as each day may be different and require some changes depending on the novel situation⁶⁷.

⁶ <https://www.kaplanco.com/ii/why-routines-are-important-for-infants-toddlers>

⁷ <https://www.parenting.com/article/finding-right-baby-routines>

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