

Secure attachment parenting

Emotional connection between an infant and their parent or caregiver through wordless communication is called attachment bonding. This wordless communication affects the way an infant develops mentally, physically, intellectually, emotionally, and socially.

The quality of this attachment bonding between an infant and parent varies. Secure attachment relationships with caregivers are a protective factor for infants and children, setting the foundation for social skills and promoting effective development and functioning of the emotional regulation and social response system of the brain.

An infant's emotional connection with its parents begins at birth, develops rapidly in the next 2 years and continues developing throughout life. It requires parents and caregivers to focus on what is happening in the moment between them and their child emotionally.

What is a secure attachment bond?

When a caregiver forms a wordless emotional exchange with their child and meets the emotional need of the child, the child feels secure, understood, and calm enough to experience optimal development of his or her nervous system. The child's developing brain organises itself to provide the best foundation for life: a feeling of safety that results in eagerness to learn, healthy self-awareness, trust, and empathy.

What is an insecure attachment bond?

When a caregiver fails to meet a child's need for security, understanding, and calm, it prevents the child's developing brain from organising itself in the best possible ways. This results in arrested emotional, mental, and even physical development, leading to difficulties in learning and forming healthy relationships in later life.

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What are the benefits of secure attachment to infants?

1. Infants who experience secure attachment with the parent have a healthy sense of self, hence feel confident and good about themselves.
2. Understand how to be in a loving, empathetic relationship. This will form a foundation for the child's future relationships with peers at school and intimate relationships as an adult. Secure children enjoy being with others.
3. Able to share their feelings with others and seek support.
4. A secure child maintains emotional balance in various situations.
5. A secure attachment gives the foundation for resilience and the ability to rebound from loss and disappointment.



What are the benefits of secure attachment to parents and caregivers?

The joy of having a secure attachment relieves fatigue and stress, and provides the “falling in love” experience for mothers and caregivers. It motivates parents, gives them energy and makes them feel happy.

Some tips for creating secure attachment:

1. The first step to creating a secure attachment starts with self-care, such as getting enough sleep, asking for support around the house from your partner, family and friends, and taking some time away for a walk or meditation.
2. The next step is calming yourself in stressful situations through deep breaths or a walk in the park. Infants need outside help to calm themselves down. An anxious parent adds to a baby’s stress.
3. Understanding baby’s cues for hunger and sleep and providing food and adequate rest when they need it.
4. When the baby is alert it is important to engage with them emotionally by playing. For example by making a funny face, playing peek-a-boo or using a silly voice. Babies can understand the calm tone of the voice and loving touch.
5. The caregiver has to respond to about one third of the non-verbal cues. You don’t have to be a perfect parent to form a secure attachment.
6. Depression, anxiety, emotional problems, high levels of stress, drug and alcohol issues and domestic violence can all interfere with forming a secure emotional attachment with the infant. So it is important to seek support as early as possible from family, friends and your GP.
7. Secure attachment parenting courses are available on the Central Coast through community services.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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