

Attachment and Bonding with Your Child

Nursing your infant. Cuddling with your toddler. Talking with your teenager. These are all ways we bond with our children and are essential to a healthy parent-child relationship. Though bonding is somewhat based on a biological link between parent and child, true bonding comes from emotional and physical intimacy.



What does bonding do for the child?

Being nurturing and responsive to your child is critically important to their development and happiness.

- ♥ **Connectedness and attentiveness:** bonding with your child helps teach them what it feels like to be in a loving relationship. When a parent is consistently *there* for their child, they are teaching them about trust and connection with another human being, which leads to positive self esteem and a sense of responsibility.
- ♥ **Self worth:** even infants begin to learn about self-worth when a parent shows they value time with them.
- ♥ **Intellectual potential:** children learn how to think logically by watching how their parents operate every day.
- ♥ **Coping with stress and frustration:** bonding helps build a child's sense of independence and security, which will eventually help them deal with stressful or challenging situations as they get older.
- ♥ **Conscience:** children learn right from wrong from parents, and begin to do so immediately.

What does bonding do for the parent?

Bonding is critical for the development of stronger, more nurturing parents. Bonding can help a parent:

- ♥ **Be more confident in their parenting choices**
- ♥ **Cope with challenges, such as teething or tantrums**
- ♥ **Be sensitive to a child's needs**
- ♥ **Better know their child**
- ♥ **Read baby's cues, such as cries**
- ♥ **Consider their child's needs when making family decisions**



KEYS TO BONDING...

For small **infants**, close, intimate connections are crucial. Smiles, eye contact, a warm soft touch and movement (such as massage, bouncing or rocking) are important. A baby needs to learn that they can consistently rely on the parent for comfort and satisfaction.

For **toddlers**, parents should encourage back-and-forth interaction. This can include singing, nursery rhymes and imitation games that require a child to respond to the parent. Displaying affection – hugs, kisses, touches – continue to be important.

For **grade schoolers**, it's about the child and parent working together. Think chores (in a fun way!), games and other activities that a child completes on the parents' terms. The point is that the child feels he or she is able to give back and contribute to a greater cause.

For **teenagers**, avoid battles over control, which are lose-lose situations. Instead, focus on encouraging verbal expression of feelings and validate those feelings! Listen attentively to your child's thoughts and pay attention to their behavior.

Make bonding with your child a priority. It's a critical step in your child's development that can dramatically strengthen your relationship and ultimately result in a happier, more secure child!

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