

Tip Sheets

Attachment Development During Early Childhood

What is Attachment?

According to the American Psychological Association, attachment is the close emotional connection that develops between an infant and their primary caregiver. It is an enduring bond that links the child and caregiver to one another. This emotional connection provides the child with a sense of security and can be observed in the child's state of calmness when in the caregiver's presence.

Developing Healthy Relationships

The health development of a child is influenced by the quality and dependability of relationships with caregivers—whether they are parents, family members, or early care and education providers.

Because relationships are at the core of development and learning, early care and education providers play critical roles in the lives of the children with whom they work.

Healthy development is influenced by the quality and reliability of these relationships. The warmth and support that children receive from early care and education providers promotes:

- Enhanced social competence
- Fewer behavior challenges
- Greater resilience
- Increased thinking and reasoning skills

In the case of healthy attachment, quantity counts as much as quality. The more often a caregiver positively interacts with a child, the more secure the attachment relationship will be. Children in



child care need the assurance of frequent caregiver responses to enable the development of trust in the caregiver as a secure base and a safe haven.

Promoting Healthy Attachment

Parents, family members, and early care and education providers can promote health attachment by ensuring quality care. Providers, in particular, can do this by:

1. Having knowledge and training in typical and atypical development, temperament styles, and attachment needs.
2. Ensuring educator-child interactions are friendly and responsive and that each child communicates their needs through an individual array of cues.
3. Being gentle, smiling, provide hugs when appropriate, and making eye contact when talking with children.
4. Warmly greeting parents and children at drop off and pick up times.
5. Establishing and implementing consistent routines and end of the day rituals to provide a sense of order and help children develop self-

control, reduce the incidence of power struggles, and teach responsible behavior.

6. Providing engaging, yet challenging activities that are based on the developmental capabilities of each child.

Quality Child Care for Infants and Toddlers

Each infant and young toddler should be assigned to a primary caregiver to facilitate the development of a trusting attachment relationship.

Note that this does not mean this is the only person who cares for the child.

Infant care should also be provided based on the child's needs rather than according to a set program schedule/routine.

Ways to Provide Quality Child Care

1. An infant should be fed when hungry rather than because it is mealtime.
2. An infant should be held when drinking a bottle, even if he is capable of holding the bottle himself.
3. One caregiver should feed no more than two infants/toddlers (sitting in high chairs) at one time to ensure the ability to provide adequate attention to the children.
4. Time in bouncy seats and car seats is brief.
5. Rotation of staff and staff turnover should ideally be kept to a minimum.
6. Caregivers should respond to each cry verbally so that the child knows he is not alone. A gentle verbal response lets him know that someone will be there soon to provide soothing and comfort.

What is Responsive Caregiving?

Responsive caregiving is the process of careful observation of a child to learn his/her cues and basing interactions and responses on these cues.

Responsive caregiving is a three-step process of watching, asking, and adapting:

Watch

... and observe for verbal and nonverbal cues.

Ask

... yourself what the child means. Do they need something?

Adapt

... and base your responses on observation and interpretation of the child's cues.



Additional Resources

Circle of Security International

<http://circleofsecurity.net>

Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health

<http://www.macmh.org>

For more information, visit www.inclusivechildcare.org.

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Funding provided by the Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families.

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