The healthy development of a child is influenced by the quality and dependability of relationships with caregivers whether they are parents, other family members or early care and education providers. There is no question that children develop attachment relationships with those who care for them in child care settings. Children need responsive, consistent and ongoing relationships with their early care and education providers.

Since 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. Warmth and support received from early care and education providers promotes...

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

The development of the attachment relationship between a child and caregiver occurs in much the same way as the parent-child attachment relationship. The quality and frequency of interactions influence the child-caregiver attachment relationship. The more often a caregiver positively interacts with a child the more secure the attachment relationship will be with the caregiver.

In the case of healthy attachment, quantity counts as much as quality. 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.

Early care and education providers can promote healthy attachment in their environments by ensuring the provision of quality care. Specific program features that are indicative of quality include:

- Caregiver qualifications and experience. Caregivers should have knowledge and...
training in typical and atypical development, temperament styles and attachment needs.

- Caregiver and child interactions should be friendly and responsive. Each child will communicate his or her needs through a distinct and unique array of cues.
- Responsive caregivers are gentle, smile, provide hugs when appropriate and make eye contact when talking with children.
- Children and parents are greeted enthusiastically by name each day.
- End of the day rituals/routines are established and consistently implemented.
- Engaging, yet challenging, activities are provided based on the developmental capabilities of each child.
- Routines give the environment a sense of order that helps children to develop self-control, reduces the incidence of power struggles and teaches responsible behavior. Knowing what is going to happen next gives children a feeling of comfort and safety.

Quality Care for Infants

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

- An infant should be fed when hungry rather than because it is mealtime.
- An infant should be held when drinking a bottle even if he is capable of holding the bottle himself.
- 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.
- Diapering time is a perfect time to provide one to one attention and talk to/with a child.
- Time spent in swings, bouncy seats and car seats should be brief.
- Spending of time on the floor with a caring adult nearby is a delightful way for a baby to be able to explore his world.
- Each infant and young toddler should be assigned to a primary caregiver to facilitate the development of a trusting attachment relationship. A primary caregiver is the person who will, as much as is possible, be the one who will care for and respond to the needs of the child. This does not mean that this is the only person who cares for the child.
- Rotation of staff and staff turnover should ideally be kept to a minimum. The rate of

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. This is a three-step process.

1. “Watch” and observe for verbal and nonverbal cues.
2. “Ask” yourself what the child means. Does he/she need something?
3. “Adapt” and base responses on observation and interpretation of the child’s cues.
Staff turnover has been linked to the quality of caregiving within a child care setting.

- While it is likely not realistic to expect a caregiver to physically respond to an infant’s every cry, it is important that a caregiver 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.

Additional Resources for Information on Attachment:

- Attachment: This Emotional Life (PBS)  
  [http://www.pbs.org/thisemotionallife/topic/attachment](http://www.pbs.org/thisemotionallife/topic/attachment)

- Circle of Security International  
  [http://circleofsecurity.net/](http://circleofsecurity.net/)

- Minnesota Association for Children’s Mental Health (MACMH)  

- Center on the Developing Child – Harvard  
  [http://developingchild.harvard.edu/](http://developingchild.harvard.edu/)

- Zero to Three  
  [https://www.zerotothree.org/](https://www.zerotothree.org/)

For more information on attachment, visit [www.inclusivechildcare.org](http://www.inclusivechildcare.org).

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Information in this tip sheet has been modified from multiple sources.

Funding provided by the Minnesota Department of Human Services.