

Tip Sheets

Attachment in Early Care and Education Programs

What is Attachment?

According to the American Psychological Association, attachment is the close emotional connection that develops between an infant and their primary caregiver.

This attachment is an enduring bond of caring that links the child and caregiver to one another. This emotional connection provides the child with a sense of security and can be observed by the child's state of calmness when in the caregiver's presence.

Developing Healthy Relationships

The healthy 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. Warmth and support received 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

Early care and education providers can promote healthy attachment by ensuring quality care.

1. Caregivers have knowledge and training in typical and atypical development, temperament styles, and attachment needs.
2. Caregiver and child interactions are friendly and responsive. Each child communicates needs through an individual array of cues.
3. Responsive caregivers are gentle. They smile and provide hugs when appropriate and make eye contact when talking with children.
4. Children and parents are greeted enthusiastically by name each day.
5. Routines and end of the day rituals are established and consistently implemented. This provides a sense of order and helps children develop self-control and comfort, reduces the incidence of power struggles, and teaches responsible behavior.
6. Engaging, yet challenging, activities are provided based on the developmental capabilities of each child.



Providing Quality 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 that 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.

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. 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.

Additional Resources for Information on Attachment

Circle of Security International
<http://circleofsecurity.net>

Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health (MACMH)
<http://www.macmh.org>

For more information, visit www.inclusivechildcare.org.

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