

# Attachment

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## What is Attachment?

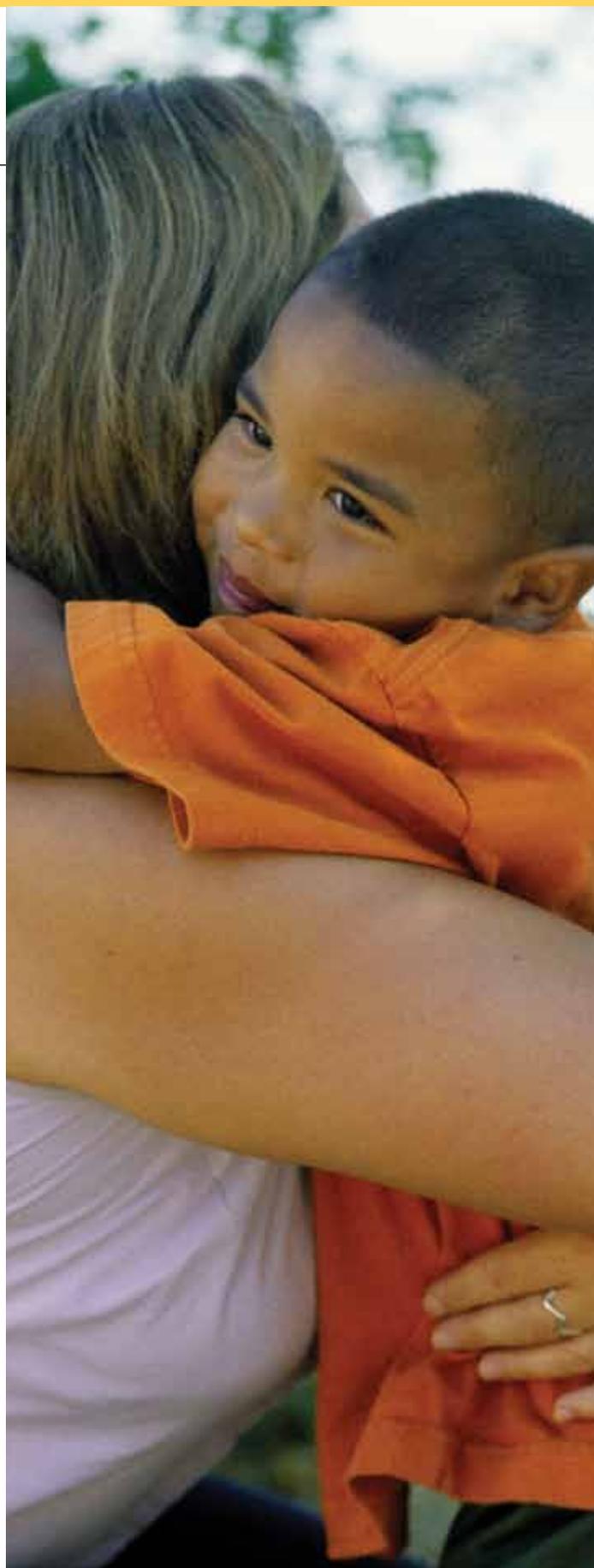
When scientists talk about “attachment,” they mean the quality of the relationship between parent and child. Attachment is the foundation for a child’s expectation that the people they love and depend on will support and help them when they need them. The goal is for children to feel securely attached, because if secure attachment exists, your child will feel safe and confident in their interactions with others, even when bad things happen or big feelings seem overwhelming.

## Why Attachment Matters

A child who has experienced comfort and acceptance consistently during his first year will usually develop secure attachment.

In addition to providing the comfort and security every baby needs, the process of becoming attached helps your child’s brain develop in ways that are critically important:

- ★ **IN INFANTS:** Newborn babies are ready to receive and respond to the care and warmth of their primary caregiver. These interactions shape the developing brain and help the baby associate experiences with emotions.
- ★ **IN TODDLERS:** By the time a child is a toddler, networks in the brain connect feelings, actions, words, and relationships. When toddlers are securely attached, they are able to rely upon these relationships, which provide the needed security to explore the world around them.



### What Parents Can Do

#### INFANTS:

- ★ Respond to and play with your baby as often as possible.
- ★ Touch is important for creating attachment. Wear your baby in an infant carrier. Hold her often.
- ★ “Secure attachment” doesn’t depend on perfect interactions with your baby every single time. Researchers have found that perfectly in-tune moments happened less than 1/3 of the time in typical pairs.



- ★ Talk to your baby during everyday moments like diapering, feeding, and bathing. This helps form connections in the baby’s growing brain between emotions, actions, and the responses of their parents or caregivers. These simple early experiences of being cared for and responded to make an infant feel safe.
- ★ Look for cues, right from the start: Notice how your baby is responding during play. Do they want your attention, or do they need a little break? When you respond, even a very young baby feels more secure.
- ★ Create a bedtime routine.

#### TODDLER:

- ★ Remember that quiet moments are better times to connect than when things are busy, exciting, or new.
- ★ Toddlers need an adult in their life who is a “secure base.” This means supporting their exploration when it is safe, setting limits when necessary, and allowing the child to return to you for reassurance or comfort when they need to.
- ★ Get support when you need it: Parenting is a big job. Don’t be afraid to turn to people you trust to help support you.

#### PRESCHOOLERS:

- ★ Talk about feelings: Young children need your help to cope with strong emotions.
- ★ Support exploration, and welcome returns: Be there to support your child as he ventures out and provide a safe place for him to return to when the world (or an emotion) feels too big.
- ★ The ability to make amends, or “repair” is a key to making a relationship feel secure. For example, if you lose your temper with your child, be willing to go to him and say “I am sorry for the way I acted when I was angry.” This will teach your child that when mistakes or disagreements happen, you will recognize the mistake, understand his reaction to the error, and behave differently in the future. When your child sees you behave this way, he learns that mistakes are not “forever” and that there is always another chance to securely connect with you.