

How Important is the Parent-Child Relationship?

In the first 3-years of life, experts believe there are clearly defining shifts in the way children understand themselves and create relationships with people and the environment. Each shift coincides with a leap in physical and emotional development. Experts point to a variety of interactions that form the basis of early relationships; they include feeding, playing, talking and bedtime routines. Through the progression of attachment shown here, you and your child will form a trusting relationship, and your child will be allowed to move from dependence to self-assertion, confidence and the ability to function independently in his/her world.

| | Birth to 2-Months | 2-6 Months |
|---|--|---|
| Your child is... | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Concentrating on adapting to his new environment—he learns to regulate eating and sleeping patterns.• Communicating—through crying, yawning and postures—your child teaches her parents how to care for her. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• More alert—he smiles, makes eye contact and deliberate sounds.• Showing excitement and can avert his gaze when the excitement is too high. |
| You are... | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learning to understand your baby's signals and responding appropriately.• Feeding your child when she is hungry, burping her when she has gas, comforting her when she is fussy, changing her when she is wet, keeping her safe and secure. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Using verbal and non-verbal cues to signal his needs.• Responding to your child's needs, playing games and interacting.• Becoming more attuned to his emotional signals and coping behaviors.• Differentiating between cries and knowing if he is hungry or in pain. |
| What's happening with the parent-child relationship? | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• By 2-months, your child can engage and disengage you with her cries and glances.• Your baby develops her first relationship and lets you know her needs. You respond. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• You and your child are falling in love—through a process where he often initiates interactions and you try to understand his signals and needs. |

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| | 6 to 15-Months | 15 to 36-Months |
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| Your child is... | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sitting up and crawling—she can move away from and towards you. • Developing object permanence—she can find a hidden toy and knows that you exist even when she can't see you. • Showing growing attachment to her primary caregiver with displeasure when she leaves, and relief and pleasure when she returns. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning to walk. He is curious and actively explores his world. • Capable of symbolic thought or pretend play. • Using verbal and non-verbal cues to signal his needs. |
| You are... | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing a safe and loving environment that she can explore. • Comforting her when she is stressed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotionally available to your child. • Setting limits and allowing your child to explore his world, his autonomy and his emotions. |
| What's happening with the parent-child relationship? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A meaningful relationships has formed between you and your child. She knows what to expect from you based on prior experiences. She also begins to become aware of her own behaviors and abilities. • Your child often looks to her primary caregiver for a sense of safety and security. • Armed with trust and the confidence of a secure base, your child can explore her world. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although excited by his exploration and autonomy, your toddler will also become overwhelmed and scared and will need to rely on you for comfort—he will often move away but then come back to safety of being with you. • Tantrums and power struggles may ensue as your toddler learns to use his own will. • As you set limits and demonstrate that you will continue to love and care for your child, he will learn self-control and understand he can “fall-apart” and still survive and be loved. |

TIPS FOR EASING SEPARATION ANXIETY

Say goodbye.

Waving bye-bye to your toddler is something you should not avoid doing. At first, this may make her cry, but, if you just disappear, and she thinks you might leave her at any time, she will cry and cling to you constantly.

Prepare your child.

Talk to your child about what is going to happen to help him think ahead. You may think he does not grasp what you are saying, but he understands much more than he can actually say.

Be optimistic

Do not let your apprehensions show when you are leaving your child. Show optimism by saying, "I think you are going to have a wonderful time playing with the other children today."

Provide a comfort object.

At first, when the anxiety is the strongest, you may want to allow your child to keep an object that will make him feel close to you. Examples: stuffed animal or a pillow from his bed.

Help label his emotions.

Even though it will be some time before your child starts to understand his emotions, you can label what he is feeling. When you are walking out the door and your child screams for you not to leave, explain what he is feeling is "missing" you. Also, add that you have the same feeling, and you understand.

Take things slowly.

When you are getting ready to go back to work after being with your child at home, it's a good idea to have a transition time with the new caregiver, your child and yourself.

Arrange same-time departures.

To make saying goodbye easier, try having your child exit first. Be sure to wave bye-bye as you leave.

Employ favorite pastimes.

When leaving, having your caregiver involve your child in a favorite pastime. He may get upset that you are leaving, but it will be much easier for him to get re-involved in something he is already working on.

Help her learn to deal with separation.

Eventually your child will learn to cope and understand that she must be separated from you sometimes.