**Parenting tips for creating a secure attachment bond**

Secure attachment doesn’t happen overnight. It is an ongoing partnership between you and your baby. As time goes on, it will become easier to understand the cries, interpret the signals, and respond to your baby’s needs for food, rest, love, and comfort—try to be patient with yourself and your baby as you learn about each other.

* **Secure attachment bond tip 1: Learn to understand your baby’s unique cues**

As parents of multiple children know, there is no one simple formula for meeting a baby’s needs. From birth, each baby has a unique personality and preferences. Each baby’s nervous system is unique as well. Some babies might be soothed by noise and activity whereas others might prefer calm and quiet. The key is to learn what your baby needs and respond to



them accordingly.

Even though all of the sounds and cries may sound the same at first, your baby is communicating with you in different ways, using sound and movement. An arched back, a scrunched-up face, eyes tightly closed, fists curled up, rubbing eyes, hyperactive or frenetic movement—all of these signs communicate something specific about your baby’s emotional and physical state.

Your task is to become a “sensory detective” and find out what your baby is communicating and how best to respond.

* Watch your baby’s facial expressions and body movements for clues about sensory needs. For example, your baby may adjust body position or facial expression, or move his or her arms and legs in response to your voice, or to indicate he’s cold or needs to be held and cuddled.
* Become familiar with the kinds of sounds your baby makes and what these sounds mean. For example, the "I'm hungry" sound may be a short, low-pitched cry, while the "I'm tired" sound may be a choppy wail.
* Note the kind of touch your baby enjoys and the amount of pressure that he or she experiences as pleasurable. With almost every touch your newborn is learning about life. The more tender your touch, the more your baby will find the world a comforting place.
* Pay attention to the kinds of movements, sounds, and environments your baby enjoys. Some babies are comforted by motion, such as rocking or being walked back and forth, while others respond to sounds like soft music, or a change of environment such as being carried outside.

Sometimes babies will be fussy no matter what you do, as when teething, sick, or undergoing a big developmental change. When this happens, keep up your efforts to communicate with and soothe your baby. Your patience, love, and care benefit your baby even if he or she continues to fuss.

Watch out for peer pressure from well-meaning family and friends. What worked for their baby may not work for yours. By learning what it takes to calm and soothe ***your*** baby, you initiate trust, and your baby begins the process of learning how to self soothe.

* **Secure attachment bond tip 2: Eating and sleeping provide important opportunities**

Many of your baby’s early signs and signals are about the need for food and proper rest. Increasing the frequency of feedings or adding in some extra time for rest where appropriate can make a big difference in your baby’s ability to engage and interact when awake.

Without proper rest, a baby cannot be calm and alert and ready to engage with you. Babies sleep a lot (often 16-18 hours a day in the first few months), and your baby’s sleep signals will come more often than you might expect. Often, babies who are overtired can act hyper-alert and move frenetically. You might mistake this energy for an invitation to engage, but really, it is your baby’s way of saying that naptime should have been 30 minutes ago.

Hunger will also be the cause of many early cues from your baby. Schedules are helpful, but growth spurts and developmental changes may cause your baby’s needs to change every few weeks so it is helpful to pay close attention to your baby’s unique signs and signals.

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* **Secure attachment bond tip 3: Talk, laugh, and play with your baby**



The importance of having fun, playing with, holding, and sharing happiness with your baby cannot be overstated. Smiles, laughter, touch, and interaction are as important to a baby’s development as food or sleep. Your body language, tone of voice, and loving touch are all important ways of communicating with your baby.

When you see signs that your baby wants to play, try to relax and then enjoy exchanging smiles, funny faces, and happy coos with your baby.

Toys, books, and music can provide a helpful starting point for play, but often all it takes is a game of peek-a-boo or a silly voice to invite your baby to interact. Infants  with an undeveloped nervous system can become exhausted very quickly, so watch for signs that your infant needs to withdraw from play because he or she has become over stimulated. If you feel uncomfortable or unsure about how to play with your baby, keep trying.

Any discomfort or embarrassment should go away when you experience the joys of interacting with your child.

* **Secure attachment bond tip 4: Let go of trying to be the “perfect” parent**

*You don’t have to be a perfect parent all of the time in order to bond with your baby*.

Just do your best, and don’t worry if you don’t always know what your baby wants. What makes attachment *secure*, rather than insecure, is the *quality* and *responsiveness* of the interaction with your baby and a willingness to notice and repair a missed signal.

**Secure attachment requires you to understand your baby’s cues one third of the time, not *every* time**

You don't have to be perfect to have a secure attachment with your infant. As long as you notice when you have missed your infant’s cue and continue trying to figure out what your baby needs, the secure attachment process stays on track. In fact, the process of realizing there’s a disconnect between you and attempting to repair it may even strengthen the relationship you have with your infant.

Parenting is frequently touted as the hardest job you will ever do. It is amazing how one tiny being can be so much work. But no one is able to be fully present and attentive to an infant 24 hours a day.

Every parent needs help and support in order to be relaxed, calm, and engaged.

* **Secure attachment bond tip 5: Dads can be primary caretakers, too**

In households where the mother is the breadwinner and dad stays at home, it is equally important for the father—as the infant's primary caretaker—to connect emotionally with his baby. The kind of multitasking required to care for a baby while simultaneously interconnecting emotionally with the infant can be harder for fathers (information travels more easily across the part of the brain known as the corpus callosum in women, making multitasking of this nature easier). However, with a little more effort, dads can still achieve the same results.

Dads, as the primary caretakers of their baby, can share activities that include:

* Bottle feeding. Dad can form a special bond with his infant when handling feedings and diaper changes by looking into his baby’s eyes, smiling, and talking.
* Talking, reading, or singing to your baby. Even though your baby doesn't understand what you're saying, hearing dad’s calm, reassuring voice conveys safety.
* Playing peek-a-boo and mirroring your baby's movements.
* Mimicking your baby's cooing and other vocalizations.
* Holding and touching your baby as much as possible. Fathers can keep baby close by using a front baby carrier, pouch, or sling during daily activities.
* Letting baby feel the different textures of dad's face.

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