

BUILDING ATTACHMENT

The attachment cycle is a pattern of need, arousal, gratification and trust. Any activity that completes the cycle adds to attachment. Many of our children have learned early in life to trust no one, and frequently push caregivers away, for fear of being hurt.

The attachment cycle often includes a combination of touch, smell, speech, motion, warmth, eye contact and even sweets.

INCREASING EYE CONTACT

Eye contact is key to attachment. Here are some ways to encourage direct eye contact.

- Get a family photo taken with everyone dressed the same. Hang it prominently in the home and frame one for each child's room. If your child is young (not a teen), buy a key chain in which to insert the picture and attach it to his backpack or belt.
- Paint his face. Let him paint your face.
- Look at each other and name the ways you are alike – you both have noses, freckles, whatever.
- Play an eye game with both parents when holding the child. Have him look into your eyes – he's allowed to blink. One parent says "go" when the child looks, and the other parent times how long the interaction lasts. Try to beat your time. It is not unusual to start at four seconds and work up to a minute. Cheer when the previous time is broken.
- Watch Shirley Temple's Captain January, or Walt Disney's Stuart Little, Pinocchio, or Tarzan. These are all great adoption movies.
- Make up an eye signal game. The child stands ten steps away from you. He looks in your eyes, you blink once, then he takes one step forward. You blink twice, and he takes one step backward. When he reaches you, he wins.

MAXIMIZING TOUCH

Even with older children, touch is a vital component of attachment – without touch, a child will not join the family and become part of the family's world. Think about how often we touch our infants in the first few years of life, for no other reason except that we love them. Some ideas about how to increase touch in a nurturing way

- Get matching temporary tattoos and put them on each other
- Comb, brush, or braid your child's hair
- Scratch his back
- Hold hands while walking
- Give him a back rub or foot rub
- Let him stay up an extra fifteen minutes past his bedtime, but make sure he spends the time in your lap.
- Wrestle
- Hold hands while saying grace before a meal
- Give a group hug before going your separate ways in the morning
- Give butterfly kisses – fluttering your eyelashes on the child's cheek – and let him reciprocate
- Play hand-holding games like "ring-around-the-rosy" or "London Bridge"
- Play a clapping game

- Give him a horsy ride.
- Tuck him in at night
- Give a goodnight hug and kiss before bed
- Tickle him, but be sure to stop when he says so

MOVING WITH YOUR CHILD

Our children are often used to moving – from family to family, from placement to placement – but they are not used to moving with the parent. Here are some ways to “move with” your child.

- Draw a picture together
- Toss a ball or beanbag
- Blow bubbles
- Fly a kite together
- Rock together, no matter how old your child is.
- Teach your child one of the dances you did when you were younger and have him teach you one of his current ones.
- Buy washable markers and draw on each other.
- Plant a small vegetable or flower garden together
- Run under the sprinkler with your child
- Play miniature golf
- Buy balloons, blow them up and play a balloon chasing game.
- Build something together
- Play “Mother, May I?” to increase compliance.
- Jump rope together
- Play “Mommy Says” or “Daddy Says” instead of “Simon Says”
- Play baby. Feed him something good and gooey – such as yogurt, pudding, or ice cream – from a baby spoon. Mom or Dad holds the spoon, the child looks in the parent’s eyes, and he gets fed. Parents can set this up as their own need by saying something like, “I never got to feed you as a baby, so I’d really like to do this”.
- Make snow angels together.
- Walk to the mailbox with the child and mail a note to someone they miss
- Go for a ride in the country.
- Sit on the floor foot-to-foot. Hold hands and rock as you sing “Row, Row, Row Your Boat”.
- Send the child to breakfast on a Saturday with one parent. The other parent stays home and does all the child’s chores for one day. This is a terrific surprise for the child and won’t ruin his sense of responsibility if it’s done occasionally.
- Make something simple and good to eat together, such as a packaged-mix goodie from the baking section of the supermarket.
- Go for a walk in the rain. Get wet. Jump in puddles.
- Tired from all this motion? Get into the car and cruise a main street. Count fast-food places and stop at the fifteenth one to eat.

NURTURING THROUGH FOOD

It is often said that we should never reward children with food and that food should not provide solace. However, we often make a practice of comforting bereaved family with a cherry pie, following an adoptive-parent support group with coffee and doughnuts, and buying ourselves a chocolate treat because we're feeling stressed.

It is not uncommon for hurt children to arrive in their new families with food issues:

- They hoard food.
- They gorge themselves.
- They eat only one or two things.
- They eat everything in sight, including nonfood items.

Children who experience near starvation very often continue to have concerns about food

In their attempts to change the food problem, parents frequently deprive the child of his favorite foods to get him to eat something more nutritious. However, deprivation will make the child's food issues even more severe. Instead of depriving him we have found it more effective to allow him to exercise more control over what he eats. If he is allowed to do so without interruption, it is much more likely that he will independently expand his food interests.

Ultimately, it is our goal to transfer the comfort the child gets from food to the comfort he can get from his parents. In the meantime, indulging his specific food issues will have a more positive effect than trying to resist them.

Here are some ideas to make food a part of nurturing.

- Serve a banana split for dinner. For no reason. Just because. Just once. The nutrition police won't arrest you.
- Buy a fancy plate at a garage sale. Serve the child his meals on it.
- Make cupcakes.
- Buy some M&Ms®. Sort them by color. Eat them together.
- Pack a picnic in the winter. Take the basket into the living room and eat on the floor on a blanket.
- Make fruit kabobs with your child. They're fun, and they're a great way to get kids to eat more fruit.
- Kick back and enjoy a cup of tea or cocoa with your child.
- Have cheeseburgers for breakfast and cereal for dinner. Why? Why not? Don't discuss it. Just do it.
- Have an un-birthday cake for dessert.
- Have a tea party. Trim the crusts from sandwiches and cut into triangles.
- Eat by candlelight ... *with* the kids.
- Dress up for dinner just because it's Tuesday. Or Thursday. Or the dog's birthday.
- Drink from canteens.

- Get a plain tablecloth and some markers that write on fabric. Design a tablecloth with your child that's used just for your family.
- Let the child make dinner or plan the menu.
- Put a love note in his lunchbox
- Make your child's favourite meal for no reason.

ENHANCING COMMUNICATION

Many hurt children have poor vocabularies, difficulty in talking in sentences and paragraphs, and poor language skills.

When good parents talk to their babies during the attachment cycle, the baby's ears and brain are flooded with sounds, syntax, and sentences. Babies are programmed by the age of ten months to learn the language their caregivers use.

Here are some ideas to have fun and help your child attach, while assisting with language development.

- Read the funnies together with the child on your lap.
- Choose cartoons that mirror your family, and make a scrapbook of them for later laughs.
- Sit with your child and read a book you chose together, chapter by chapter, every day.
- Mail your child a note.
- Make an audio tape of your family singing. It is especially fun if you can't sing well.
- Discuss where you would go if you could fly.
- Post a happy note on your child's door
- Tell your child you need help with a home repair. Let him hold the flashlight or screw in a screw.
- Order a magazine subscription for the child. Read it together when it comes in the mail
- Teach the child nursery rhymes. If you've forgotten them, get a book to help.
- Tell the story of your child's adoption -again and again.
- Trace a word on your child's back with your finger. If he guesses the word, he gets a point. (And you get to touch the child more, practice spelling with him, and have fun.)
- Have your child teach you something that he's good at-such as a video game.
- Go to a concert with your adolescent. You don't have to like the music-you just need to be there with him. If it's too loud, you'll get over it ... and you'll have a story to tell your friends.

GETTING WARM AND COZY

When we pick up babies, they get warm from our body heat. When we change them, they get warm from a clean, city diaper. When we feed them, they get warm as their stomachs fill up. They even enjoy containment at times, such as playpens, highchairs, and being held tightly.

Providing containment can be very nurturing, affording a child the opportunity to "play baby".

- Set up a card table. Put a blanket over it and play baby underneath.
- Set up a pup tent in the living room. Zip the child in to play and zip him out when he wants out-or let him do it himself.
- Buy a cardboard or plastic playhouse and set it up indoors or in the yard.
- Turn a daybed around with the opening against the wall. This makes a perfect crib for an older child.
- Make or buy a soft, warm blanket to use while watching television, reading, or engaging in other quiet activities.
- Let your child sleep in a sleeping bag on the bed instead of under a blanket. It's cozier.
- Put his gloves and scarf in the dryer for a few minutes to make them warm. They'll feel wonderful and will send him off to school with a comfy feeling.
- Share a lap robe while watching television.
- Is your car cold in the morning? Take along a small blanket to tuck around your child's legs.
- Pitch a tent in the backyard or the basement and climb in with your child.

JUST HAVING FUN

Family memories are " usually about funny incidents, and laughter is a great stress reliever. Here are some ideas for just having fun.

- Play hooky. Don't go to work and keep your child home from school. Have fun.
- Buy a plant for your child. Teach him to care for it.
- Get up on Saturday morning, make a list of what needs to be done, then rip it up and go something fun instead. No one ever died from a dust bunny.
- Get a new, *big* box of crayons and throw away the old shabby ones. Just because.
- Buy a small treat-a cute eraser, stickers, or a poster-and put it in the child's room as a surprise.
- Go to garage sales and resale shops, and buy loads of dress-up clothes.
- Wear the pin, scarf, or macaroni necklace that the child gave you-even if it's hideous.
- Make a magic wand. Use it to make wishes.
- Color with your child.
- Buy bathtub toys. Even young teens like a rubber duck.
- Have a pajama party with the family.
- Learn a craft together.
- Do something kind for a neighbor.
- Buy a beautiful candle. Light it for the people you and the child miss.
- Cheer for the same team.
- Pretend you're a tourist in your town and visit something interesting.
- See school as *one* component of your child's life. Remember-most subjects in school are not *that* important. Just how well did you do in algebra, geometry. or world history? Has your 0 or D-minus ruined your life? Do your friends know just how poorly you did? Does anyone care now?

This handout contains excerpts from Chapter 5, "Cinnamon on Applesauce: Nurturing the Hurt Child", from the book Parenting the Hurt Child, by Regina Kupecky and Gregory Keck.