



PARENT  
RESOURCE  
CENTRE  
OTTAWA

Newborn

Infant

Toddler

Pre-school

## NURTURING STRONG PARENT-CHILD CONNECTIONS

### How to Support Secure Attachment through the Parent-Child Relationship



*Attachment is the deep, lasting connection that children develop with their primary caregivers, starting even before they are born. It is like a sturdy rope that ties you together, helping your child to feel safe, loved, understood and comforted. This attachment connection helps your child's brain grow strong and healthy. It teaches them how to love, trust and get along with others. And the best part is it's never too late to deepen your connection to your child. Secure attachment is the foundation for children's healthy brain development, ability to handle feelings and stress, and capacity to build resilience.*

### NEWBORNS

**Newborns** are born ready for connection. Spend time learning your baby's cues and getting to know their unique preferences and needs. **Touch** is important for creating attachment so, cuddle and hold your baby whenever you can or use an infant carrier if that works for you. **Play, talk and respond** to your baby throughout the day and during routine activities like changing diapers, feeding and bathing. Remember, you don't have to be perfect at understanding your baby's cues right away. You're both figuring things out together. When you respond with love and care, your baby learns they matter!

*Babies need to know that you will be there whenever they need you.*

Your new baby communicates through eye contact, coos, body language and crying. This is known as “serve and return” interaction. When your baby “serves” a smile, a coo, or a gesture, respond by “returning” the same expression or action. Even though they can't yet use words, these back-and-forth moments are super important. These loving interactions help your baby's brain grow and make connections between experiences and emotions.



## INFANTS AND TODDLERS



*Infants and Toddlers* love to explore knowing you're there for them. Keep things **consistent** and **predictable** with lots of love and cuddles. Be their safe place cheering them on and soothing them when they're upset. They need lots of help to share, cope with their feelings, and make sense of the world. Young children develop skills such as language, physical, social emotional and cognitive learning through play. Create a **safe environment** for them to explore and follow their lead. Embrace their curiosity and have lots of back-and-forth interactions with them during routines such as mealtime, diaper changes, bath time, or when running errands. **Talk, play games, sing, read, and explore** joyfully together! Peek-a-boo is a favourite. Toddlers are *learning that the world is a safe place they can explore with lots of support from caring adults.*

## PRESCHOOLERS

*Preschoolers* are growing fast and developing new skills. Young children still need lots of love, connection, and support to maintain those secure attachments. Continue to play, cuddle, and comfort your child. Offer them **choices** and let them **experiment** and **problem solve** in a safe and supportive environment. Encourage **exploration** and **self-help skills** and do your best to be there for them when they need empathetic connection. Help them understand their feelings and others' and guide them through tough situations. Use fun games, imaginative play, stories, music and physical play to make learning and growing enjoyable.

Stick to predictable routines and loving limits to help your preschooler thrive. By the time your child becomes a preschooler, their brains have developed networks linking feelings, actions, words, and relationships. When securely attached, they feel confident to explore their world, knowing you're there to support them every step of the way. Preschoolers are developing their can-do attitude and confidence, and they need lots of practice and repetition to master new skills.



*Parenting can be tough, and it's okay if you don't always get it right. If you make a mistake, take the time to make things right with your child. By doing this, you're showing them that it's okay to make mistakes and learn from them. Do your best to take care of yourself too, so you can be there for your child. Reach out to supportive family, friends, and community resources to get your emotional cup filled too. Building a strong attachment with your child is a journey filled with love, laughter, and learning. Be patient, be kind, and watch your bond grow stronger every day.*