

A Hug is not Just a Hug

| building bonds builds healthy children

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What exactly is Bonding? And why is Bonding so important for your child?

Forming strong bonds with your child during their early years is key to good/compliant/obedient behavior. Bonds in early infancy are formed by holding, cuddling, wooing, playing with, feeding, massaging, looking at, smiling at, talking to, reading to and singing to the baby. As bonds form, trust builds. As trust is built, the child will tend more so to do what the parent asks (especially when a simple reward such as a smile, praise, hug, small trinket, hand shake, high five, tiny candy, or small piece of fruit is given).

As the baby grows into the toddler years and begins to independently explore, a good parent bond/attachment makes the job of teaching and supervising much easier. A bonded/attached child is more likely to seek parent approval to maintain the relationship (which is pleasurable to the child). Thus, when a bonded child hears the parent's voice or is given a directive by the parent s/he tends to come toward the parent or obey the parent.

Allowing the child to explore the world in a safe supervised setting is needed so that s/he can develop courage, confidence and social skills. A child with a strong early parental bond is most likely to transfer that positive relationship/trust onto another caregiver (babysitter, teacher) provided there is some transitional time and the new caregiver also uses effective bonding strategies (holding, smiling, conversing, cooing, praising, playing with or otherwise appropriately engaging the child). A good early childhood teacher implements these strategies (as well as a predictable routine/structure) to maintain a positive, upbeat morale, cheerful atmosphere and happy campers in the classroom.

A child with good parental bonds is essentially more emotionally secure, sleeps better, has a better appetite, is more attentive, cognitively processes more efficiently and usually develops appropriate social skills at an earlier age.

Effects & Remedies for Bonding Deficiencies

Children whose early bonding wasn't as optimal as needed are more vulnerable to emotional distress. These children are more likely to exhibit anxious or depressive symptoms, be less compliant/obedient, aloof, or disengaged and exhibit what professionals may term attachment issues.

Remedies for attachment issues to improve bonding were written about extensively by Ann Jernburg, the founder of the Theraplay Institute in Chicago, IL (1960s) and the author of the book Theraplay. Theraplay and most other forms of play therapy (there are different approaches which distinguish these, as do the goals of the therapy) aim to enhance and make stronger the parent-child bond or the caregiver-child bond and engage the child in pleasurable social interaction. Even if a parent is unavailable to participate with the child in a therapeutic relationship, the child can benefit from the play relationship with another nurturing parent figure. The main objective being to engage the child, promote person to person enjoyable and appropriate interaction, build social skills, interpersonal confidence and emotional security, by transmitting the message that s/he is loved and cared about.

Parents who work full-time or who suffer from various mental or physical illnesses are more likely to notice anxiety, depression or attachment issues in their children (but not always pending the qualities of the substitute caregiver and also the innate traits of the child). These children may be restless, hyperactive, non-compliant, testy, wander off, avoid eye contact, seem aloof, be reluctant to try or participate, have sleep disturbances, etc. Parent-child exercises to enhance bonding and reengage the child may include floor time play together (ex. Building with blocks, rolling balls back and forth, playing with cars, trains, dolls, farm animals, etc), or lap time (holding the child, scratching, stroking, massaging their back, arms, hands, singing or reading to them, doing finger plays, etc.) These basic techniques will help to rebuild and reinforce bonds and reengage a child in the early years (from about 0-7 yrs old). Some of the techniques may also work on older children if modified. With consistency in giving floor time and lap time, attachment increases and symptoms of anxiety or depression are hopefully reduced. As emotional stability and security increase (trust) the child's readiness for higher order processing using cognitive and social skills increases. Thus, laying the groundwork with our children in those early years helps them become more ready for the next developmental level of challenge, be it school, work, or developing their talents to a higher level.

To begin formation of Christian spirituality development the parent during lap time could: 1) read an early childhood book with colorful pictures about Jesus 2) teach a short song such as "Jesus Loves Me" or "This little light " or 3) recite a brief prayer or a psalm (Psalm 23, The Lord is my shepherd, works well). This can enhance bonding and also helps reinforce the seeds of conscience formation which begins when the toddler learns the meaning of and behaviors that go with the words "yes" and "no". Healthy conscience formation is an integral part of Christian development.



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