

Connecting with Your Baby



Lesson Outline

General

- The purpose of this workshop is to provide practical tips for parents and simple messages on the topic of parent-child attachment.
- The workshop is designed for parents of children aged 0 to 1.
- The ideal group size is 8-12 parents and their babies.
- The recommended workshop length is 60-75 minutes.
- Facilitators should be familiar with their local children's mental health services and social services, in case some parents feel they need additional supports.
- This workshop is designed for the general population. Facilitators are encouraged to adapt this workshop to meet local needs.

Key Messages

- It is important to comfort your baby when he needs it, especially when he is hurt, sick or frightened.
- It is important to talk, read, play and have fun with your baby every day.
- Each baby has a unique personality and has many ways to communicate his needs.
- If your baby feels safe, it will help him develop to his potential.

Suggested Agenda

- Introduction of presenter and topic. (1-2 minutes)
- Introduction of participants and their babies. See suggested ice-breakers, page 2. (10 minutes)
- Overview of attachment. See page 3. (10 minutes)
- Activities. See pages 5-8. (30-45 minutes)
- Additional resources and information. See pages 11-12. (5 minutes)
- Conclusion and evaluation. See page 9. (5 minutes)

NOTES

- *Background information for facilitators is provided on page 10.*
- *A parent handout is available to complement this workshop. See last page.*
- *In this document, the baby is sometimes referred as "he" and sometimes referred as "she", to simplify the text.*



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Suggested Ice-Breakers

Select one of these ice-breakers.

How would my baby react?

- Have participants introduce themselves and introduce their babies.
- Have them respond to a question: *“How would your baby react if...”*

You can vary the hypothetical situation encountered by the baby with suggestions that may be relevant to the group or situation. Here are some suggestions:

- ... a small dog came into the room and licked his face?
 - ... she attended a new mom and baby group?
 - ... he heard a loud noise like thunder?
 - ... a stranger tried to pick her up?
 - ... a large red ball rolled by him?
- Discuss the different responses shared by parents and caregivers.
 - Mention/discuss that they will know how their baby will react because they have observed her reactions before: they are becoming the expert about how their baby reacts with the environment and the experiences in that environment. Also note that babies may react differently because of personality and previous experiences. Thank the participants for their comments.



What is special about my baby?

- Have participants introduce themselves and introduce their babies.
- Have participant respond to the question: *“What is one difference you have noticed about your baby’s personality compared with another baby you know?”*
- Write their responses on a flipchart / white board.
- Some examples might be:

- Their baby’s reaction to new food.
- The number of naps he takes each day.
- Whether she likes listening to music.
- Whether he cries when he meets new people.
- Whether she is quiet and shy when she is in a new place.
- Whether he likes to play quietly on his own.

Variation: You can also ask them to respond to the question: *“What does your baby do that makes you feel happy?”*

- Mention/discuss that the main caregiver is generally aware of some of the personality traits of their baby. Note that babies all have different likes and dislikes, because of their personalities and previous experiences.
- Thank the participants for their comments.

Overview of attachment

Provide participants with basic information on attachment and its importance for child development.

Definition:

Attachment is an affective tie between an infant and his primary caregiver that bonds them together and lasts over time. (Ainsworth)

Explanation:

Your baby needs to know you will be there if he needs you. This will make him more confident when exploring his environment. Exploring his environment will help him develop to his greatest potential. Babies and parents are “relationship-ready” to have secure attachment, because it is essential to the survival of humans. In other words: they know how to get your attention and your natural reaction is to respond to them.

Ask the group: *What are some of the things you can do to help your baby feel safe?* Make note of the answers and add more as necessary. Here are some suggestions:

- Comfort your baby when she needs it.
- Respond to your baby when she is trying to get your attention.
- Provide care such as food, clothing and baths.
- Talk and sing to your baby.
- Respond to her cues such as smiles, tears and cooing.

Ask the group: *What are some situations when it may be difficult to respond to your baby?* Make note of the answers and supplement as necessary. Here are some suggestions:

- Comforting your baby when you when you are already very stressed about a situation.
- Going to pick up your baby during the night when you are very sleepy.
- Responding to your baby when you are already doing something else with another young child who is demanding immediate attention.



Indicate that there are times when it may be difficult to respond immediately to your baby's needs but your baby should know you will respond most of the time fairly quickly. Keep in mind that responses can also include using your voice if your hands are already full, as the sound of your voice can also provide comfort. Babies need to be able to count on you, especially when they are sick, hurt, sad, upset or frightened.

If your baby knows he can count on you, he will feel safe and develop a **secure** attachment. If he can't predict your response, he will feel unsafe and will develop an **insecure** attachment. Children who have developed an insecure attachment may be afraid to explore their environment or may be too independent of other people. The type of attachment they develop will influence the child's

thinking, learning, feeling and behaviour throughout life. That is why you want to help your baby develop a secure attachment.

Most children develop a secure attachment¹. Most children who show insecure attachment² will develop coping skills to help them through life. It is typically children who have experienced confusing and even frightening responses from their parent who may exhibit serious behavioural problems³.

Ask the group: *Are there times when it is OK to let the child cry?*

Make note of the answers and clarify certain points.

Here are some suggestions:

- Reinforce that a caregiver cannot “spoil” a baby who truly needs comforting.
- In some cases, the baby will cry constantly and the caregiver may not feel that she can soothe him (“colicky baby”). A baby’s constant crying can be stressful. Sometimes it is okay to put the baby in the crib and let the baby cry for a short time to give yourself a break. Try to call someone for help during these stressful times. Never shake a baby.
- An older child (2 years and older) may have tantrums. The source of the child’s emotions should be understood and acknowledged. The child should never feel rejected. As possible, help the child solve the problem causing the frustration or re-direct the child’s attention.
- A baby may also have difficulty falling asleep alone and may cry when left alone. It is important for a baby to learn to calm himself when going to sleep. Such interventions are beyond the scope of this workshop but here are some resources on the topic:
 - Online tips from the Canadian Paediatric Society for various age groups are available at: www.caringforkids.cps.ca/healthybodies/healthysleep.htm.
 - Healthy Sleep for Your Baby and Child. Pamphlet available from the Canadian Paediatric Society at: www.cps.ca/english/publications/bookstore/healthysleep.htm



Mention to the group that their own experience growing up may affect how they will react to their baby’s needs. Life factors such as stress can affect their interactions with their baby.

Ask the parents: *Are there some tips you can share with the group on coping with stress?*

Encourage positive coping strategies such as getting help, calling a friend, being physically active, doing something for themselves when possible, etc.

¹ Provide percentage if asked: 55-60%

² Provide percentage if asked: 23-30%

³ Provide percentage if asked: 15-20%

Suggested Activities

Select one or more activities from the list below. The choice of activity will depend on the group, on your comfort level and on the material, equipment and time available.

Video “A Simple Gift – Comforting Your Baby”

Description:	Show the video “A Simple Gift – Comforting Your Baby” to the group and follow it with a discussion.
Suggested time:	15-20 minutes (10 minutes video, 5-10 minutes discussion)
Availability:	Purchase from Infant Mental Health Program, Hospital for Sick Children, www.sickkids.ca/IMP/Resources
Complementary documents :	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Guide for Professionals– Guide for Parents and Other Caregivers– Comforting Your Baby Summary for Parents and Caregivers
Suggested questions for discussion:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– <i>Are there some reactions of babies or caregivers shown in the video that surprised you?</i>– <i>Is there something you could do with your baby right now to help her feel better?</i>

Video “Listening to Baby”

Description:	Show the video “Listening to Baby” to the group and follow it with a discussion.
Suggested time:	20-25 minutes (14 minutes video, 5 -10 minutes discussion)
Availability:	Purchase from The Attachment Network (Manitoba), www.attachmentnetwork.ca .
Complementary documents: (contained on the DVD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Scenes of short interactions between babies and parents.– Interviews with background information.
Suggested questions for discussion:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– <i>Can you relate to some of the parents in the video? Which ones and why?</i>– <i>Do you think most people are aware that babies begin to form relationships from the time they are born?</i>
Variation (additional 5-10 minutes):	Show one or two interactions between babies and parents (pre-select these according to your audience). First, have participant try to guess what the baby may be thinking. Then, play the corresponding scenes where the baby’s voice has been dubbed in.

Why is the baby crying?

Description: Show one or two pictures of babies that are crying to the participants. Ask the participants to take a minute to consider the following questions and then discuss these as a large group:

- *Why is the baby crying?*
- *How do you think the baby feels?*
- *What baby cues make you think so?*
- *Does the baby know how to make herself feel better?*
- *What could help the baby feel better?*
- *How will the baby feel if this doesn't happen?*

Suggested time: 10-15 minutes

Tip: You can find a variety of baby pictures by doing a search on "Baby crying pictures" on the internet.

Additional information: Stress that it is not always clear why the baby is crying but responding to the crying is important in helping the baby feel loved and building a secure attachment.

From Joan Urquhart. Used in the workshop 'Loving vs Spoiling', developed by the Infant Parent Program in Hamilton.

How would you feel?

Description: Encourage the participants to think of a situation where they needed to reach out to someone for help. This will help build empathy for the baby's needs. Once they describe the situation, ask them the following questions:

- *How did you feel?*
- *Were you able to get help?*
- *If not, how did you feel?*
- *If you did get help, how did you feel towards the person who helped you?*

Suggested time: 5-10 minutes

Variation: Provide a hypothetical example of a situation someone can find themselves in where they need immediate help (roadside car breakdown, basement flooding, purse snatching) and ask similar questions to above.

My Child and I

Description:	Have participants come up with suggestions of things they can do to build attachment in the first year of the baby's life. Have the caregiver-baby pairs practice some of these suggestions. Many suggestions are available in the booklet "My Child and I – Attachment for Life".
Suggested time:	15-20 minutes
Availability:	Best Start Resource Centre. www.beststart.org/resources/hlthy_chld_dev
Tip:	Reinforce the positive caregiver behaviours you see such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Responding to the baby's distress.– Understanding and responding to the baby's cues.– Holding the baby affectionately.– Maintaining eye contact.– Focusing on the baby, even when there are distractions.– Talking or singing to the baby.– Knowing the stages of development and having appropriate expectations.– Letting the baby initiate some of the interactions.– Taking into account the baby's personality.
Variation:	If a baby is sleeping, encourage her caregiver to observe another caregiver-child pair and provide positive feedback.

What is my baby thinking?

Description:	Have each participant think of a situation they can safely expose their baby to, in the context of the workshop room (toy, song, person, food, physical activity, etc.). You may want to actually set up activity stations in the room ahead of time. Each caregiver-baby team goes in an area of the room and does that activity. As the activity progresses, the caregiver tries to understand what the baby is feeling and thinking through reading the baby's cues. The caregivers then describe the activity and baby's cues to the group: <ul style="list-style-type: none">– <i>What was their baby's reaction?</i>– <i>What do they think their baby was feeling and thinking?</i>– <i>What were their own feelings and thoughts, and how did they respond?</i>
Suggested time:	10 minutes
Tip:	Reinforce all positive behaviours at reading the baby's cues, including those related to the baby not showing interest to the activity. Ask the caregiver if they would do something different next time.
Variation:	If a baby is sleeping, encourage his caregiver to observe another caregiver-child team and provide positive feedback.

Scrapbooking

Description:	Over a number of weeks or months, caregivers can build a scrapbook highlighting special moments they have experienced with their baby. This activity is more appropriate for groups who meet on a regular basis and can be enhanced by materials provided by the facilitators (photos taken of the caregiver-baby pairs, nice paper to write positive thoughts or describe special moments, page decorations, suggestions for milestones, etc.).
Suggested time:	Varies. 15-30 minutes per session. Many hours in total.
Materials:	Digital camera, printer and photo paper. Scrapbook supplies. Markers, glue, scissors, etc.
Tips:	This activity can be started during the prenatal stage and continued through the baby, toddler and preschool stages. Content ideas for a baby scrapbook can be found by doing an internet search using “baby scrapbook”. Although fancy scrapbook books and pages can be purchased, a lower-cost alternative is to use an 8 1/2 X 11 binder and letter-size pages. Various borders and clip-art can be printed more easily on such pages.
Variations:	Some commercial websites offer interactive tools where parents, friends and family can provide content for baby scrapbooks. These can be found by doing an internet search on <i>baby scrapbook online</i> .

Conclusion and Evaluation

Summarize the key messages of the workshop:

- It is important to comfort your baby when she needs it, especially when she is hurt, sick or frightened.
- It is important to talk, read, play and have fun with your baby every day.
- Each baby has a unique personality and a unique way of communicating her needs.
- If your baby is secure, it will help her develop to his potential.

Based on the procedures of the agency that is offering this workshop, an evaluation may be required. Evaluations measure the short and long-term impact of the training program.

You can measure participants’ immediate responses formally or informally. One informal method is simply to collect their comments and responses after taking part in the training session. One formal method would be to have them fill out an evaluation. There is a sample evaluation on the next page.

It may also be very useful to follow up, three to six months after the session, to see if there have been any changes in the behaviours. This means you will need to collect participants’ contact information and their written permission to contact them. These are the kinds of questions you could ask them in the follow up:

- Do you remember taking part in the session?
- Can you summarize the key message or messages of the session?
- Did you change your behaviour after this session? If so, what are you doing differently? If not, why not?

Tell us what you think

Participant evaluation

Please take a few minutes to complete this form. It will help us to improve the workshop.

Put an X in the box that describes what you think. Add comments if you wish.

1. "I understand attachment more than I did before attending the session".

- Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly agree

2. "I think I will be able to use the suggestions provided in the session".

- Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly agree

Please explain: _____

3. "I found the discussions helpful."

- Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly agree

Please explain: _____

4. Overall, how would you rate the session?

- Poor Fair Good Excellent

5. How could the session be improved?

Background Information for Facilitators

If you want to learn more about parent-child attachment, we encourage you to consult the following resources:

- **Assessing Attachment – Still Face Experiments**

Some videos of the experiments done by Mary Ainsworth and colleagues to assess attachment are available online.

- Mary Ainsworth experiments: www.youtube.com/watch?v=QTsewNrHUUH&NR=1
- Still Face Experiments: www.youtube.com/watch?v=apzXGEbZht0

- **Connections for Life.** A Resource Kit developed for Community Action Program for Children (CAPC) and Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP) staff. The kit can be purchased from the Saskatchewan Prevention Institute and activity sheets can also be downloaded from their website.

www.preventioninstitute.sk.ca

- **Family Front and Centre – Attachment.** A support resource promoting healthy child development produced by the Jewish Family Service.

www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/dca-dea/publications/ffc-ief/book-livre-1-eng.php

- **First Connections... make all the difference.** This website contains fact sheets developed by the Public Health Agency of Canada. Four fact sheets are for professionals and three are for parents. The fact sheets for professionals will provide you all the basic knowledge you will need to answer most of the parent's questions.

www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/mh-sm/mhp-psm/pub/fc-pc

- **First Three Years.** This charitable organization, located in Toronto, focuses on developing parenting programs to optimize healthy child development during infancy (0-3). Currently, facilitator training is available to offer two programs:

- *Make the Connection for babies – Birth to one.*
- *Make the Connection for toddlers – Age one to two.*

Both programs involve 9 parent sessions. The third and final phase of Make the Connection for 2-3 year olds is currently in development.

www.firstthreeyears.org

- **Understanding Attachment: How Early Relationships Influence the Brain's Architecture.**

A component of the online course "Caring for Canada's Children" designed for settlement service providers working with newcomer families and their young children.

www.mothercraft.ca/index.php?q=534



The following resources can be used during a workshop for parents (see Activities, pages 5 - 8)

- **A Simple Gift – Comforting Your Baby.** A program developed by Infant Mental Health – Hospital for Sick Children. Includes a video, a facilitator guide, a parent/caregiver guide and a parent handout. www.sickkids.ca/IMP/Resources
- **Listening to Baby.** A DVD developed by the Attachment Network of Manitoba. This DVD contains three parts:
 - A section for parents, explaining attachment and using testimonies of parents.
 - Scenes of real-life, short interactions between babies and parents show many different, subtle cues babies give to caregivers.
 - Two interviews, one with a doctor and one with a therapist, providing an introduction to attachment theory and a discussion of intervention approaches.www.attachmentnetwork.ca
- **My Child and I.** A resource for parents of children aged 0-3 to help them understand the principles of attachment and learn ways to promote attachment. Activities are suggested for each age group. Available in 10 languages. www.beststart.org/resources/hlthy_chld_dev

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Best Start: Ontario’s Maternal, Newborn and Early Child Development Resource Centre
180 Dundas Street West, suite 301, Toronto, ON M5G 1Z8
1-800-397-9567
www.beststart.org

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Comfort your baby when she needs it, especially when she is hurt, sick or frightened.

Your baby has his own ways of letting you know what he needs.



It is important to talk, read, play and have fun with your baby every day.



If your baby feels safe, it will help him develop.



Your can't spoil a baby! The loving care you give your baby builds her trust in people. By responding to her cries, she learns that the world is safe and predictable. This will help her explore and learn.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Attachment Parenting Canada

Provides parenting information and links to attachment support groups in Canadian cities.

www.attachmentparenting.ca

Healthy Babies Healthy Children Program

A prevention and intervention program offered by all the public health units in Ontario. ServiceOntario: 1 800 267 8097 www.ontario.ca/children

My Child and I – Attachment for Life

A parent booklet developed by the Best Start Resource Centre. Available for download in 10 languages.

www.beststart.org/resources/hlthy_chld_dev

Ontario Early Years Centres

Places throughout Ontario where parents and caregivers can take part with their children in a range of programs and activities.

www.ontario.ca/earlyyears

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