

WHAT ATTACHMENT PARENTING IS – THE 7 BABY B'S

Attachment parenting is a style of caring for your infant that brings out the best in the baby and the best in the parents.

7 ATTACHMENT TOOLS: THE BABY B'S

1. Birth bonding

The way baby and parents get started with one another helps the early attachment unfold. The days and weeks after birth are a sensitive period in which mothers and babies are uniquely primed to want to be close to one another. A close attachment after birth and beyond allows the natural, biological attachment-promoting behaviors of the infant and the intuitive, biological, caregiving qualities of the mother to come together. Both members of this biological pair get off to the right start at a time when the infant is most needy and the mother is most ready to nurture

"What if something happens to prevent our immediate bonding?"

Sometimes medical complications keep you and your baby apart for a while, but then catch-up bonding is what happens, starting as soon as possible. When the concept of bonding was first delivered onto the parenting scene twenty years ago, some people got it out of balance. The concept of human bonding being an absolute "critical period" or a "now-or-never" relationship was never intended. Birth bonding is not like instant glue that cements the mother-child relationship together forever. Bonding is a series of steps in your lifelong growing together with your child. Immediate bonding simply gives the parent- infant relationship a headstart. (See "Birth Bonding")

2. Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding is an exercise in babyreading. Breastfeeding helps you read your baby's cues, her body language, which is the first step in getting to know your baby. Breastfeeding gives baby and mother a smart start in life. Breastmilk contains unique brain-building nutrients that cannot be manufactured or bought. Breastfeeding promotes the right chemistry between mother and baby by stimulating your body to produce prolactin and oxytocin, hormones that give your mothering a boost.

3. Babywearing

A baby learns a lot in the arms of a busy caregiver. Carried babies fuss less and spend more time in the state of quiet alertness, the behavior state in which babies learn most about their environment. Babywearing improves the sensitivity of the parents. Because your baby is so close to you, you get to know baby better. Closeness promotes familiarity.

4. Bedding close to baby

Wherever all family members get the best night's sleep is the right arrangement for your individual family. Co-sleeping adds a nighttime touch that helps busy daytime parents reconnect with their infant at night. Since nighttime is scary time for little people, sleeping within close touching and nursing distance minimizes nighttime separation anxiety and helps baby learn that sleep is a pleasant state to enter and a fearless state to remain in.

5. Belief in the language value of your baby's cry

A baby's cry is a signal designed for the survival of the baby and the development of the parents. Responding sensitively to your baby's cries builds trust. Babies trust that their caregivers will be responsive to their needs. Parents gradually learn to trust in their ability to appropriately meet their baby's needs. This raises the parent-child communication level up a notch. Tiny babies cry to communicate, not to manipulate.

6. Beware of baby trainers

Attachment parenting teaches you how to be discerning of advice, especially those rigid and extreme parenting styles that teach you to watch a clock or a schedule instead of your baby; you know, the cry-it-out crowd. This "convenience" parenting is a short-term gain, but a long-term loss, and is not a wise investment. These more restrained styles of parenting create a distance between you and your baby and keep you from becoming an expert in your child.

7. Balance

In your zeal to give so much to your baby, it's easy to neglect the needs of yourself and your marriage. As you will learn the key to putting balance in your parenting is being appropriately responsive to your baby – knowing when to say "yes" and when to say "no," and having the wisdom to say "yes" to yourself when you need help.

MORE ABOUT ATTACHMENT PARENTING

- **AP is a starter style.** There may be medical or family circumstances why you are unable to practice all of these baby B's. Attachment parenting implies first opening your mind and heart to the individual needs of your baby, and eventually you will develop the wisdom on how to make on-the-spot decisions on what works best for both you and your baby. Do the best you can with the resources you have – that's all your child will ever expect of you. These baby B's help parents and baby get off to the right start. Use these as starter tips to work out your own parenting style – one that fits the individual needs of your child and your family. Attachment parenting helps you develop your own personal parenting style.
- **AP is an approach, rather than a strict set of rules.** It's actually the style that many parents use instinctively. Parenting is too individual and baby too complex for there to be only one way. The important point is to get connected to your baby, and the baby B's of attachment parenting help. Once connected, stick with what is working and modify what is not. You will ultimately develop your own parenting style that helps parent and baby find a way to fit – the little word that so economically describes the relationship between parent and baby.
- **AP is responsive parenting.** By becoming sensitive to the cues of your infant, you learn to read your baby's level of need. Because baby trusts that his needs will be met and his language listened to, the infant trusts in his ability to give cues. As a result, baby becomes a better cue-giver, parents become better cue-readers, and the whole parent-child communication network becomes easier.
- **AP is a tool.** Tools are things you use to complete a job. The better the tools, the easier and the better you can do the job. Notice we use the term "tools" rather than "steps." With tools you can pick and choose which of those fit your personal parent-child relationship. Steps imply that you have to use all the steps to get the job done. Think of attachment parenting as connecting tools, interactions with your infant that help you and your child get connected. Once connected, the whole parent-child relationship (discipline, healthcare, and plain old having fun with your child) becomes more natural and enjoyable. Consider AP a discipline tool. The better you know your child, the more your child trusts you, and the more effective your discipline will be. You will find it easier to discipline your child and your child will be easier to discipline.