

Parenting tips: attachment parenting the older child

Advantages and benefits of practicing attachment parenting include healthy child development. Here is a brief overview of some practices, guidelines and beliefs of AP for a toddler or older child.

While attachment parenting might be easier in an infant, whose needs are usually easy to determine, it can be just as rewarding when dealing with an older child, from the toddler years through adulthood. The demands placed upon a parent do change as a child ages. However, the core of the attachment parenting philosophy remains the same – respect and love for the child. Here is a brief look at some of the more practical aspects of attachment parenting as applied to older children.

Remaining Emotionally Responsive

Children who grow up to be compassionate people have usually had compassion modeled to them during their growing-up years. Compassion means looking through the eyes of another. Attachment parenting encourages parents to remain emotionally responsive to their children, attempting to see the world through their eyes and then respond to their needs in a loving manner. Additionally, young children sometimes have difficulty expressing their emotions, so emotionally responsive parents help reflect their children's feelings.

Continuing a High-Touch Style

Attachment parenting in an infant involves lots of hands-on time – time in the sling, time in arms, time at the breast. Attachment parenting older children involves plenty of hands-on time, as well. Giving your children hugs throughout the day, cuddling up to read a book, even hugging a child immediately after a reprimand, all help reinforce with children that touch is good, and that they are loved. Sometimes parents can get so caught up in the daily activities that they neglect to hug their children enough. Older children may be resistant to hugs, but persist without demanding. Children reluctant to share a hug may be more receptive to other forms of touch, such as a backrub, a pat on the back, or a man-to-man slug on the shoulder.

Becoming Educated About Child Development

Learning about the stages of child development, and what is normal for each stage, can help parents develop appropriate expectations for their child. For example, it is unreasonable to expect a 3-year-old to sit quietly through a long dinner.

Maintaining Healthy and Positive Sleep Routines

Many attachment parents choose to sleep with their infants in bed with them. Many families find that sharing their bed with their children remains enjoyable for years, and choose to let their children decide when the time is right to move to their own beds. Even after a child begins sleeping in his own room, he may enjoy snuggling up with siblings, or even just sharing a snuggle with his parents while he falls asleep. Recognize that a parent cannot force a child to go to sleep just because it's bedtime – instead, try suggesting that the child simply lay down and close his eyes for 15 minutes.

Using Gentle Discipline

Children who have been raised with the attachment parenting philosophy usually trust their parents and are internally motivated to please their parents most of the time. This makes them easier to discipline, generally speaking. Most attachment parents avoid the use of violence or yelling to discipline their children, preferring instead to use positive discipline techniques. For example, allowing the natural or logical consequences of their actions to teach a lesson, rather than punishment. (The child refuses to put his dirty clothes in the hamper, so they don't get washed and he has only dirty clothes.) This approach helps the child learn to develop self-control and self-discipline, rather than obeying simply to avoid punishment.

Being Available

Children, no matter their age, need their parents to be available. Even teenagers enjoy knowing that their parents are there when needed. Being available means more than simply being present – it means being involved, listening, and spending quality time with your children. When parents are unable to be present themselves, they should consider finding appropriate adult supervision for their children, rather than leaving them by themselves. Even teenagers will benefit from not being “latch key kids.”

Continuing to Maintain Balance

Maintaining balance within the family when there are older children means not only ensuring that mom and dad avoid burnout, but also ensuring that the children do not burn out. Limit activities and avoid over-scheduling children. Children enjoy – and need – unscheduled time to play, read, talk, or spend time with friends. Make sure to spend time together as a family, as well – whether it be through spending meal times together, or scheduling special “family nights” to play games or do other activities. Likewise, ensure that each child is able to have some one-on-one time with each parent.