

# **The Journey of Attachment**

## ***A Practical Roadmap for Parents and Children***

### **Tools**

#### **Nurturing Through Food**

There are many ways parents can use food to increase attachment. Be selective with these activities, and use the ones that feel right for you and your child. The activities listed below are intended to be fun; don't force participation in something that feels like a chore. Attachment is a process of give and take. Be sensitive to your child's feelings, and don't push an activity if he's not receptive.

Ways to use food to nurture your child:

- Serve a banana split for dinner.
- Feed your child by hand.
- Buy a fancy plate at a garage sale and serve the child his meals on it.
- Bake together.
- Buy M&Ms and sort them by color.
- Have a picnic in the living room.
- Have cheeseburgers for breakfast and cereal for dinner.
- Set up a lemonade stand.
- Feed him.
- Let him drink from a bottle.
- Make finger Jell-O.
- Go out to dinner together.

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#### **Activities for Increasing Eye Contact**

There are many ways parents can increase eye contact with their children. Here are some ideas to help you and your child look at each other, and at other things, together. Be selective and use the ones that feel right for you and your child. Remember, these activities are intended to be fun; don't force participation in something that feels like a chore. Attachment is a process of give and take. Be sensitive to your child's feelings, and don't push an activity if he's not receptive.

- Play Peek-A-Boo.
- Give child a disposable camera and encourage him to take pictures.
- Face painting.
- Count facial features (nose, eyes, freckles).
- Dress the same.
- Put a sticker on your face, but don't comment on it (wait till child does).
- Watch "adoption theme" movies together and talk about what is happening.
- Play card game where no one can take a turn till eye contact is made.
- Turn off lights and play with flashlights; whenever beam falls on child he has to look at you until you count to five.

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#### **Promoting Touching, Closeness and Security**

Be selective in your use of activities, and use the ones that feel right for you and your child--they are intended to be fun, not a chore. Attachment is a process of give and take. Be sensitive to your child's feelings, and don't push an activity if he's not receptive. Remember to consider your child's emotional

age, not his chronological one, and vary the activities accordingly.

Promote touching and physical closeness with tactile stimulation. Here are some ideas to help you and your child touch each other in fun, non-threatening ways:

- Put hand lotion on each other
- Put matching temporary tattoos on each other
- Comb, brush or braid the child's hair
- Hold and cuddle the child every day
- Let child stay up 15 minutes past bedtime, but only if he sits in your lap
- Give butterfly kisses
- Play hand-holding games like "Ring Around the Rosy" or "London Bridge"
- Teach child to somersault, inline skate, or bike.
- Give goodnight hug and kiss before bed
- Tickle him, but be sure to stop when he says so

Sharing Physical Activities encourages attachment with your child by promoting closeness.

- Draw a picture together
- Toss a ball or a beanbag
- Blow bubbles and chase them around
- Fly a kite together
- Rock together in a rocking chair
- Teach each other dances
- Catch fireflies and let them go
- Play jacks
- Play a clapping game
- Give him a horsey ride
- Go bowling
- Play tag
- Get a pogo stick and take turns jumping
- Buy washable markers and draw on each other
- Plant vegetables in the garden together
- Buy sidewalk chalk and draw pictures together
- Play badminton, croquet, horseshoes
- Build a snowman together
- Shoot baskets together
- Go for a walk in the rain together
- Paint your nails the same color
- Hold hands and rock together and sing "Row, Row, Row Your Boat"
- Play hopscotch

Providing Containment makes them feel warm and secure.

- Set up a card table and put a blanket over it and play underneath
- Set up a tent in the living room
- Buy a cardboard or plastic playhouse and set it up in the living room or in the yard
- Make a playpen using cushions or stair gates
- Buy a warm, soft blanket to use while reading or watching television
- Let the child sleep in a sleeping bag
- Put gloves and scarf in the dryer for a few minutes to make them warm
- Steam up the bathroom and draw on the mirror together

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## **Maintaining Inner Strength**

A few suggestions to help parents maintain their inner strength:

- Remind yourself often that you are not the source of your child's problems.
- Acknowledge your own feelings of grief and frustration.
- Maintain a sense of humor.
- Maintain a central supportive relationship with another adult.
- Participate in (or form) a support network with other parents dealing with attachment issues.
- Maintain trust and openness with an assisting professional.
- If your child has other caregivers, make sure their actions are consistent with yours.
- Be patient and maintain realistic day-to-day goals.
- Remember that if your child is able to form an attachment with you, you have participated in a psychological rebirth.

Adapted from Daniel A. Hughes, *Facilitating Developmental Attachment: The Road to Emotional Recovery and Behavioral Change in Foster and Adopted Children*. Jason Aronson, Inc., 1997.

## **Manipulation**

Strategies for parenting children with attachment issues vary depending on the severity of the child's problems, the child's temperament, and the child's emotional age, but there are some interventions that work well with most children. Be sure to choose the ones that work for you and your child, and never do anything that will hurt the child or put him in danger. Some of these suggestions may seem contradictory to parenting strategies. Keep in mind they are strategies for children with attachment issues.

### **Control Issues**

Avoid or redefine control battles as much as possible. Only engage in a control battle if you are sure you can win.

### **Consequences**

Children need to be responsible for the consequences of their actions. Punishments should naturally result from the misbehavior. A spill should be cleaned up, a broken object mended or paid for. Don't tell the child the consequence of misbehavior beforehand because that gives them control over how they behave and limits your options.

### **Praise**

Praise specific instances of good behavior, with eye contact and a touch.

### **Contrary Expectations – Surprise Reactions**

Encourage misbehavior so child is forced to comply or resist and do the right thing. For example, say "That was a loud scream; can you do an even louder one?"

### **Restitution – Righting a Wrong**

Teach the child to make amends by giving something back to the person who was wronged. Have them apologize, give a hug, write a note, or do something else meaningful for the other person.

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## **Control Issues**

There are many different strategies that can work with children who want to control every situation. Select those that work for you and your child, but remember to consider the child's emotional not chronological age and adapt accordingly.

Deborah Gray suggests the following techniques:

## **Jobs**

Children who are causing extra work for others because of their disagreeable and controlling behavior may be given jobs to do. This labor pays back the family for the extra effort the child is requiring. The assigned job must be done before the "next good thing." Basically, the good things in life are the privileges that are part of family life: books, desserts, television, toys, etc. Until the job is done, none of those things are available to a child. If the child resists and delays, they wait, with the parents enforcing the "no good things" rule in a firm, matter-of-fact manner.

If James, for example, were to call his sister a "poopy head," then James would get the responsibility to do restitution by making his sister's bed before the next good thing. Retreating into his room in order to play in his room would not be an option for James. If James chose to wait, he would need to do so where he could be observed. After a few hours of boredom, even children who proclaimed, "Never!" will usually grumble their way off to do the job. Cheeriness is not a requirement for completing the job.

## **Fines**

Some children who seem to be natural bean counters respond well to fines. If Annie were to hit her mother, it might be a \$5.00 fine. Annie's mother would collect the money and spend it ostentatiously upon herself. If Annie were to raise her hand to threaten her mother, the fine would also be enforced. Children can also be fined on behalf of others. A girl who intimidated her sister by bumping into her was fined for each bump. The practice stopped immediately. The girl admitted that she did it to let her sister know that she was in charge. She agreed that the fines were fair. (This section refers to the younger child when discussing hitting. Physical abuse or threats by older children are not addressed in this section.)

## **Worker Status**

Worker status is simply an extension of the "jobs" concept as described earlier. It is used when children are regressing, using a pattern of non-stop opposition to parents. I refer to children who are being blatantly disrespectful to parents as not acting like "family boys" or "family girls." They get to be on "worker status" until they get the concept of taking on the responsibilities of being in a family. While on worker status, they have no privileges. For example, six-year-old Shelley was placed on worker status because she was oppositional to the parent. Shelley needed to vacuum two rooms correctly. If she behaved agreeably and cooperatively, at the end of her task, she could go back on "family girl" status. If she were still surly, the parents would keep giving her chances to work until she could act like a family girl. (There is a limit to this intervention. Children are not to be on "worker status" overnight. Consequence differently if opposition is not resolved by the end of the day. It is not to go on for a series of days.) Interestingly, children have often told me that this was one of the most effective pieces in helping them turn things around. The work helps them do restitution, as well as calms them, and gives incentives to make changes.

## **Time In**

Children who are having a hard time benefit from a non-punitive "time in" with a parent. Parents can say, "Jim, you seem to be having a rocky morning after yesterday's visitation. I would like you to stay in the same room as I am until you seem like you are feeling better. Right now you have a big "no" coming out of you. You will be with me until that gets smaller."

## **Over the Lap**

While this is inappropriate for older children, when young children destroy things, try to hurt others, or run away when upset, I suggest that parents place them tummy side down over the parent's lap. This position is safe for a young child, and gives good protection from being hurt. Parents should be certain that they do not hurt the child. Put a pillow between the parent's legs and the child's tummy for the thin child. The child's head hangs down from one end of the lap, and the child's legs dangle from the other side of the parent's lap. It is fairly easy to hold the child's legs with one arm and the child's hands with the other arm. When the child calms down, turn him over in your lap and talk. If he begins to fight again, turn him back over. He needs to control himself for about thirty seconds without yelling or fighting in order to be let go. While the child may still be angry, the goal is to get him to control his anger well enough not to fight. Parents tell their children something like this at the end. "Susan, good choice not to fight your parents. You will have five minutes to continue your calm down. Then, you will need to sweep the front porch. That

was the job that you were doing before your hissy fit. You will need to sweep the back porch as well, in order to pay me for the time that I just spent helping you with your hissy fit."

Children who rage over the lap beyond fifteen minutes will need professional help, which includes consultation about being safe in the home.

### **Give Alternatives that Include Calm-Down**

Parent says, "Sean, you have a few minutes to calm down with your blanket. Then, you will go outside to start cleaning up after the dog. Think about some ways that you could do this dog job without getting even more jobs as a consequence. Right now though, you can relax and calm down."

### **Practice Compliance**

Children can be given five-minute sessions in which they do things that their parents ask them to do. This time is structured, fun, and filled with praise. It resembles the "Simon Says" game. Children do what parents say, and get lots of attention. This game starts to redefine what it means when parents are in charge. Instead of feeling like they are losing, children find that it feels silly, non-threatening, and fun. This starts to redefine control.

From Deborah D. Gray, *Attaching in Adoption: Practical Tools for Today's Parents*. Perspectives Press, Inc.: The Infertility and Adoption Publisher 2002. Used by permission.

### **Sharing Activities Together / Play**

You can build the ability to be in sync with one another by doing some of the following:

- Draw a picture together
- Toss a ball or a beanbag
- Blow bubbles and chase them around
- Fly a kite together
- Rock together in a rocking chair
- Teach each other dances
- Catch fireflies and let them go
- Play jacks
- Play a clapping game
- Give him a horsey ride
- Go bowling
- Play tag
- Get a pogo stick and take turns jumping
- Buy washable markers and draw on each other
- Plant vegetables in the garden together
- Buy sidewalk chalk and draw pictures together
- Play badminton, croquet, horseshoes
- Build a snowman together
- Shoot baskets together
- Go for a walk in the rain together
- Paint your nails the same color
- Hold hands and rock together and sing "Row, Row, Row Your Boat"

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## **Strategies for Handling Lying and Stealing**

Lying and stealing are difficult behaviors to respond to, because they are often habits that the child is not even aware of.

### **Avoidance**

Don't put the child in a situation where he is likely to lie. If you know he did something wrong, why ask if he did it?

### **Disbelief**

With a child who habitually lies, let the child know that you don't believe anything he tells you.

### **Unpredictability**

Respond in unexpected ways so the child has to change his "script" to respond.

### **Encourage Truth Telling**

Make two boxes, one for lies, one for truths. Every time the child says something, ask him which box it should go in.

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## **Techniques to Help Children Sleep**

Tools and techniques to help children sleep vary depending on the degree of attachment, and the child's emotional age. A few to consider are:

- Give the child a bottle and rock him to sleep.
- Establish a bedtime ritual.
- Read or sing to the child.
- Stay with the child until he falls asleep.
- Rub, pat, or touch the child's back.
- Provide a comfort object that belongs to or smells like the parent.
- Provide soft, warm sleep garments like blanket sleepers or flannel bed sheets.
- Put a sleeping bag on a mat on the floor beside your bed.
- Look into if co-sleeping might be a good option for your family, always following safe sleep guidelines.

Ask your pediatrician for more information regarding safe sleep guidelines for your baby.

## **Helping the Child Grieve**

There are several tools and techniques that parents can use to help children to acknowledge, accept, and grow from their grief:

- Talk about your own and other people's losses and grief.
- Read books to your child about loss and grief and show how others have lived through their losses.
- Suggest that the child keep a journal where they write or draw about their feelings.
- Find ways for your child to commemorate their past. Light candles, create a special section in their lifebook, frame a particular drawing pertaining to their loss.
- Help them find positive ways to express their feelings through physical or spiritual activities.
- Help your child learn to cry. Many children have been taught not to cry. Help them appreciate the healing power of tears. Let them see you cry.

From *Grief and Loss in Older Adopted Children* ([www.olderchildadoption.com/rad/griefloss.htm](http://www.olderchildadoption.com/rad/griefloss.htm)) by Susan M. Ward. Copyrighted. Used with permission from Older Child Adoption, [www.olderchildadoption.com](http://www.olderchildadoption.com), a website dedicated to sharing insights into the joys and challenges of older

child adoption.

## **Helping Children With Regression**

Techniques for helping children with regression will depend on the emotional age of the child. The best strategy is to care for the child like they are indeed at an earlier developmental stage.

### **Infant**

Bottle feed with eye contact; Skin-to-skin contact; Bathe with the baby; Sing and dance with the baby; Limit caregivers. Establish routines.

### **Toddler**

Carry the child; Read books together; Use eye contact activities; Stroke cheeks; Praise; Establish routines and rituals.

### **Preschool**

Play; Eye Contact; Associate food and nurture; Holding.

## **Transition: Continuity Helps Build Attachment**

Building attachment with a new family can begin even before the child leaves the orphanage or foster home. It is important to establish continuity between the child's environment and the adoptive home.

- Before bringing the child home, learn about the child's routines, eating and sleeping times, likes and dislikes.
- Give the child an object like a blanket or stuffed animal with your scent on it.
- Ask to take an object like a blanket or article of clothing from the orphanage (bring one to replace it), and don't wash it so it keeps its familiar smell.
- Buy or make a tape or CD of lullabies in the child's native language.
- When the child first comes home, let no one else hold her except the parents.
- Isolate yourselves at home for the first week or two, with as few visitors as possible.
- Establish a predictable daily routine in the household.
- Bottle feed the baby, hold her and make eye contact.
- Use a baby sling or cloth carrier and carry the baby all day while you go about household tasks.
- Try swaddling baby when you feed and hold her to make her feel secure.
- Maximize skin-to skin contact. Hold the naked baby against your bare skin at times. Wear short sleeves.

Adapted from Jessica Jerard, "Promoting Attachment in Adopted Infants."  
<http://www.fccny.org/newsletter/default.asp?36#Promoting>

## **Coping With Sensory Integration Issues**

There are many ways parents can help their child cope with sensory integration issues. Be selective with these activities, and use the ones that feel right for you and your child. Attachment is a process of give and take. Be sensitive to your child's feelings, and don't push an activity if she's not receptive.

- Lots of bubble blowing.
- Drinking with a straw, especially thick milkshakes.
- Whistle blowing.
- Party blowers -- the ones that un-curl and then curl back up again.
- Provide different kinds of textures to move around -- both with his tongue and with his hands: baby peas, rice, couscous, puddings, Jell-O. Paint a plate with chocolate pudding and then eating it off the plate and hands is fun -- although you might want to try a colored plate and vanilla pudding if your child is under two.
- Wake up his taste buds -- sour candies like Sweet Tarts, chili, pepper, mustard, paprika, pickles -- anything with vinegar. Learning the sour taste is especially important.

- Making "mouth music."
- Tear tissue in small pieces or strips and blow it across the table top.  
From: [http://www.adoptachild.us/Adoption Article, "Activities to Promote Attachment"](http://www.adoptachild.us/Adoption Article, )  
Tactile stimulation promotes touching and physical closeness. Here are some ideas to help you and your child touch each other in fun, non-threatening ways.
- Pass the lotion. Get lots of lotion on your hand and let your child try to get all of it off, and then pass it back and forth.
- Slippery hands. After lotioning, pretend to hold on tight to each others' hands and then "whoops" slip off backwards with lots of exaggeration and laughter.
- Hand Stacking. Place your hand on the bottom, then one of your child's, then yours, then your child's. Slip your bottom hand out and put it on top. Just keep on going to "build the stack".
- Lotion painting. Paint pictures on each other and then rub them in and start over.
- Put matching temporary tattoos on each other.
- Comb, brush or braid the child's hair.
- Hold and cuddle the child every day.
- Let child stay up 15 minutes past bedtime, but only if he sits in your lap.
- Give butterfly kisses.
- Play hand-holding games like "Ring Around the Rosy" or "London Bridge".
- Teach child to somersault, inline skate, or bike.
- Give goodnight hug and kiss before bed.
- Tickle him, but be sure to stop when he says so.

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### **Alternative Treatments - Bedwetting**

If a child over age six is experiencing encopresis (fecal soiling) or enuresis (daytime incontinence and bedwetting) the parent should consult with the child's pediatrician to determine if the problem is physical or psychological.

Although parents may not be able to prevent a child from wetting the bed, there are steps they can take to help the child keep the bed dry at night, including:

- Encouraging and praising the child for staying dry, and not punishing when the child wets.
- Reminding the child to urinate before going to bed.
- Limiting liquid intake at least two hours before bedtime.

Traditional treatments for bed-wetting include behavior modification, drug therapy, psychotherapy, and diet therapy; additional treatments include massage, hypnosis, and homeopathic remedies. It is best to consult with your pediatrician to find the best treatment for your child.

### **Behavior Modification**

Child takes responsibility for his own bladder control by learning new behaviors. For example, always use the bathroom before bedtime and avoid drinking fluids after dinner.

### **Alarms**

A sensor placed in the child's pajamas or in a bed pad triggers an alarm that wakes the child at the first sign of wetness. If the child is awakened, he or she can then go to the bathroom and finish urinating. The intention is to condition a response to awaken when the bladder is full. This is a popular and effective form of treatment.

### **Drug Therapy**

Some drugs commonly used are a nasal spray of desmopressin acetate (DDAVP), a substance similar to the hormone that helps regulate urine production; and imipramine hydrochloride, a drug that



helps to increase bladder capacity. These medications are usually effective, however, children often wet the bed again after the drug is discontinued, and there are some side effects.

### **Psychotherapy**

Children with attachment issues are often already in therapy. If bedwetting is a problem, the therapist should be informed to determine if a psychological factor can be determined.

### **Diet**

In rare cases, allergies or intolerances to certain foods - such as dairy products, citrus products, or chocolate - can cause bed-wetting. Bedwetting may be stopped if the food is identified and eliminated from their diet.

### **Massage**

Acupressure or massage, when done by a trained therapist, may be helpful when bed-wetting is caused by a neurologic problem.

### **Herbal and Homeopathic Remedies**

Some herbal remedies, such as horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*) have also been used to treat bedwetting. Common homeopathic remedies include *Causticum*, *Lycopodium*, and *Pulsatilla*.

### **Hypnosis**

Hypnosis is another approach that has been used successfully. It trains the child to awaken and go to the bathroom when his or her bladder feels full.

From: "Bed-wetting." Genevieve Slomski, Ph.D. THE GALE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF MEDICINE, by Jacqueline L. Longe, Gale Group, (c) 2001 Gale Group Reprinted by permission of the Gale Group

## **Schoolwork Struggles**

Homework is a problem for most children at some time in their school career. Some suggestions to follow if your child is struggling:

- Go to school weekly and collect the child's assignments.
- Keep up with assignments so you can ask relevant questions.
- Ask your child to teach you what he learned in class that day.
- Sit down and work together. Balance your checkbook or write a letter while your child does his homework.
- Listen to biography or math-fact tapes in the car together.
- Read aloud to your child from one of his textbooks.
- Form a homework club with another family.
- Share the load – tutor a subject you're comfortable with and find other families to tutor other subjects.
- Let your child listen to music while he studies, if it is not distracting.
- Make a special homework spot where books and on-going projects can be kept.

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## **Infant Massage**

Consider infant massage. It creates a bond between you and your baby, creates a calm and relaxing atmosphere, and gives you a special time together. It improves digestion, circulation, and muscle tone. It stimulates the skin and increases oxygen and nutrient flow. Many hospitals provide infant massage classes but here are some basics:

- Find the best time for you and your baby, usually that's when the baby is quiet and alert.
- Start with the legs.
- Use long, firm strokes, repeating it 5-8 times.
- You may use oil.
- Massage for about 15 minutes, watching the baby for signs of engagement or distress. Engagement signals include opening eyes, smiling, reaching, moving arms and legs, and babbling. Distress signals include yawning and falling asleep, crying, hiccupping, arching the back. Stop the massage if the baby is exhibiting stress signals.

## **Transitions – Newborn**

Establishing consistent routines should be done as soon as your baby joins your family, and should be maintained and modified as your baby's development progresses.

- Limit number of caregivers during the transition period.
- Establish predictable schedules around feeding, bathing, naptime, and bedtime.
- Make rituals around feedings, bathtimes and bedtimes. Do the same things in the same order each time.
- Ensure that both parents are participating in baby's routine care. If one parent returns to work, he or she should participate in evening care to ensure both parents are establishing attachment.
- Avoid scheduling major life events like moving to a new home or adding another family member until your baby is settled.