

# Attachment

## What is attachment?

Attachment requires healthy and safe exchanges between a child and parent/caregiver in which each seeks closeness and feels secure when in the presence of each other.



## What are attachment bonds?

An attachment bond is a non-verbal emotional **connection** between a child and parent/caregiver. Attachment bonds can happen at any age. They allow a child to feel safe, secure, and understood. To create a secure attachment bond, parents/caregivers need to manage their own stressors and remain available, calm, and regulated to meet the child's emotional needs.

## Why is attachment important?

Secure attachment builds the foundation for a child's later social and emotional outcomes, academic performance, and mental well-being.

## What are the factors that can affect a child from developing a secure attachment bond?

- A child is mistreated or abused.
- A child is moved from one caregiver to another (i.e., adoption, foster care, loss of a caregiver).
- A child is hospitalized or separated from their primary caregivers.
- A child gets attention from parents and caregivers only when they use challenging behaviour to communicate distress.



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- Adults respond in an inconsistent manner. Sometimes a child's needs are met and sometimes they are not. The child never knows what to expect.

## What can parents/caregivers do to support safe, healthy, and secure attachments?

- **Eye Contact** – when a child notices an adult looking at them affectionately, they feel safe, supported and calm. Maintaining eye contact sustains the back-and-forth non-verbal communication between the caregiver and child.
- **Facial Expression** – even without words, a calm and attentive facial expression communicates a safe and secure bond between the adult and child. It tells the child that the adult is engaged and available.
- **Tone of voice** – use a tone that conveys tenderness, interest, concern, and understanding. The tone of voice should match with the words being used.
- **Touch** – the way a parent/caregiver touches a child communicates an emotional state. A gentle touch to the arm or a reassuring pat on the back can suggest a positive relationship between the parent/caregiver and child.
- **Body Language** – parent/caregiver appears relaxed, in an open posture, leaning towards the child.

## What does the research say about attachment?

Fifty years of research has shown that children with a secure attachment:

- Experience more happiness with their families
- Feel less anger at their parents/caregivers
- Get along better with peers
- Have stronger relationships
- Can problem solve with others
- Feel more competent and capable
- Know that most problems will have an answer
- Trust that good things will come their way
- Trust the people they love
- Know how to be kind to those around them

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### References

From Raising a Secure Child, Hoffman, Cooper, and Powell 2017

## Additional Supports for Attachment:

### The Circle of Security:

A way to gain insight on how to promote secure attachments between children and caregivers/parents.

<https://www.circleofsecurityinternational.com>