

Falling In Love

[Infant Attachment]



Program Goals

To enhance responsive, sensitive parent-child relationships by:

- Fostering mothers' observations of their children's cues, pacing, temperament, etc
- Increasing mothers' emotional availability to their children
- Promoting mothers' understanding of their children's behaviors based upon developmental stage
- Underscoring the bi-directional nature of the mother-child relationship

Session Aims

1. To define the meaning of attachment, and the importance of that feeling in the mothers' lives
2. To understand how attachment is formed, and the dynamics of attachment and separation
3. To gain skills in responding appropriately to infant attachment behaviors and to separation

Concepts

1. Attachment is a basic developmental process that begins in infancy.
2. The quality of the early attachment relationships, particularly that between mother and infant, lay the basis for later relationships with other adults and with peers.
3. Maternal responsiveness to infant cues and needs shapes the quality of the attachment relationship.

Participants

Mothers only

Preparation

In the Legacy room for the mothers, place chairs in a circle. Have enough chairs for each expected participant and for the Intervention Specialist. The Intervention Specialist's chair should be the closest to the dry erase board/flip chart and the distance between other chairs should be slightly greater than others in the circle. The Intervention Specialist may choose to use floor chairs at any time.

Prepare Flip Chart



Flip Chart **Attachment Parenting**

Attachment provides

- feelings of safety, stability, and confidence
- a pattern or guide during unsure times

Attachment becomes

- a sharing of emotions and goals
- a feeling of belonging
- a sense of right and wrong

Attachment leads to

- reduced anxiety
- self esteem
- independence
- conscience

Adapted from Butterfield, P.M., Dolezal, S., & Knox, R. M. (1995). **Love is layers of sharing. A curriculum written for Partners in Parenting Education.** Denver, CO: How to Read Your Baby.

Hand-outs



Prepare and distribute to the mothers the one hand-out entitled:

- "Attachment Parenting"

Greeting

Questions And Comments

The Intervention Specialist asks if there are:

- a. Any questions or concerns that they would like to discuss,
- b. Any announcements that they would like to share,
- c. Any questions or comments regarding last week's session?

Defining Attachment

Intervention Specialist says, "Today, we will be talking about attachment, a dynamic and growing process. Attachment is another word for a deep emotional commitment and connection to another person. It is more than a friendship. It is love. We want to be physically close to the person. We feel lonely when they are not with us, or at least are happy to see them after even a brief separation. We feel confident and fulfilled when they are happy. We feel distressed when they are sad. We are willing to alter our lives for their well-being."

Intervention Specialist says, "Think about whom you are attached to. What does it feel like for you?" **Allow time for mothers to respond.**

"Let's talk about your baby. Do you worry when your baby is out of your sight, or you are away from home? Do you feel happier when you are around your baby? Do you feel happier when you come home and see your baby? Do you feel protective of your baby? Do you worry or think about what your baby needs? If you are stressed, are you comforted by being around your baby? Does your baby give you a sense of belonging or being connected? Do you feel more valued because you are a mother?" **Encourage responses.**

"Now let's think about your attachments to adults. Think about your partner, or your parents, or a friend. Do you feel happier, less worried when you are near them? When you are away from them, are you eager to see or speak to them? Do you want their help when you are worried or in trouble? Does your love for them make you feel more valued? Does it give you a sense of being connected, of belonging? Are you comforted by being around them? Do you feel more valued by your love for them?" "How does your attachment to your baby differ from your attachment to an adult?" **Allow time for discussion.**

Prompts for the Intervention Specialist:

- "Do you feel more protective to your baby?"
- "Do you feel as though your baby depends on you more than does the adult?"
- "Do you want the adult to understand you and to satisfy your needs?"
- "Do you have less need to have your baby understand and satisfy you?"

Intervention Specialist summarizes by saying, “Your attachment to your baby differs from your attachment to an adult. Your baby is more needy than is an adult. Therefore, you feel more protective to your baby than you do to an adult. Therefore, you expect less of your baby in understanding and satisfying your needs. You feel more that you have to satisfy your baby’s needs.”

Baby’s Attachment

Intervention Specialist asks, “Do you think your baby is attached to you? How does your baby show it? Your baby’s ways of showing attachment will be both similar and different from that of an adult. But the general principles will be the same; that is, your baby will want to be near you; will need you for comfort; and will want to be engaged with you socially and emotionally.” Allow time for discussion.

Prompts for the Intervention Specialist:

- “Does your baby prefer for you to hold and cuddle her/him?”
- “Does your baby want you when he/she is upset? Does he/she stop crying when you pick her/him up?”
- “Does your baby often stop crying just when you come into the room?”
- “Is your baby beginning to be shy of adults he/she doesn’t know?”
- “Does your baby seem content to play by him/herself as long as he/she can see or hear you?”
- “Does your baby poke at your eyes, mouth, ears, glasses, earrings, etc.?”
- “Does your baby try to copy or imitate you?”
- “When you are talking to someone else, does your baby begin to whine?”
- “Is your baby beginning to look toward you to check in and find out if someone or something is safe?”
- “Does your baby want you constantly?”

The Meaning Of Attachment To Babies’ Development

Intervention Specialist says, “Your baby’s becoming attached to you is a basic developmental process. How your baby shows the attachment to you will change and develop over the next few years. But the attachment relationship to you will be a powerful and lasting force in your child’s life. Do you sense this feeling of attachment?” ***Allow time for responses.***

“Your child will depend on you for feelings of safety and protection. Because of your baby’s trust in you for protection, he/she will be able to explore the world with less fear. Your relationship will be a model for your baby of what to expect from others. Your baby will copy your feelings and attitudes to the larger world.”

What Do Mothers Do To Help Their Baby Feel Secure In Their Attachment?

Intervention Specialist asks, “How do you think that you help your baby feel secure in their attachment to you?” ***Encourage responses.***

Prompts for Intervention Specialist:

- “Do you think it helps your baby feel secure if you read your baby’s cues/signals and respond appropriately?”
- “Do you think it helps your baby feel secure when you reassure and comfort?”
- “Do you think it helps your baby feel secure when you hold and cuddle your baby?”
- “Do you think it helps your baby feel secure when you laugh, sing, play, talk together?”
- “Do you think it helps your baby feel secure when you plan ahead, in order to help your baby avoid exhaustion, fear, and frustration?”

The Changing Nature Of Attachment

Intervention Specialist says, “As your children develop, they will change in how they show their attachment to you. Typically, between 6-12 months of age, many infants — but not all — will deal with 2 important issues, stranger wariness and separation anxiety. Both of these issues develop from the basic ingredients in attachment; that is, babies prefer and choose one person above most others, and want that person to be around, to be physically close.”

“Stranger wariness, although not shown by all babies, expresses the baby’s feeling that they prefer you and trust you — but are unsure as to whether to trust the stranger. While your baby previously may have been willing for anyone to pick him/her up, now — or soon — they may become distressed by a pick-up from a stranger. While your baby previously may have smiled quickly at everyone, now — or soon — they may not.”

“Have any of you noticed your baby acting like this?” ***Encourage the mothers to give examples.***

“Have any of you noticed your baby showing separation anxiety? That is, when your baby becomes distressed when you are out of sight, or leave the room, or leave the house?” ***Elicit examples from the group.***

“This is the age, or soon will be, when your babies take great note of your departure, but are not yet able to comfort themselves with the knowledge that you will return. The entire process often takes months and can vary in intensity, and takes a great deal of patience from you.”

“Do you remember when we talked about the importance of developing the habit of reading to your baby and how this would be important in promoting your baby’s school success? Well, now we are going to talk about another habit that will promote your baby’s health and happiness and future friendships. Get in the habit of telling your baby when you are leaving and when you are returning. Even though your baby may not really understand at this point, over time, they will understand the message, and it will become comforting.”

“Don’t be surprised if you observe the following behaviors when you walk away and leave your baby — no response, a little bit of fear, real anger and distress, and finally the baby says to him or herself, ‘I’ll let her go peacefully, because I know she will be coming back.’ As your babies become more caught up in the issue of separation anxiety, in the sessions to come, we will be talking about more strategies you might use to help your baby.”

Closing

“The importance of healthy, positive attachments cannot be underestimated. Time and time again, professionals have made the same observation. When a mother and a baby show a trusting and secure relationship, especially when the baby learns and trusts that the mother is steady in her abilities to read the baby’s cues, respond to the baby’s cues, and be a consistent presence in the baby’s life, the baby’s chances for future positive relationships with others are greatly improved. Do you have any comments or questions about our discussion on attachment?” **Allow time for responses.**

“Next week’s session is entitled, ‘How I Play With My Mother’. We will talk about how you and your baby can play imitation games and turn-taking games. Remember that this session will include your babies.”

The Intervention Specialist assists the mothers’ transition to the FUN Club.

References

1. Butterfield, P.M., Dolezal, S., & Knox, R. M. (1995). **Love is layers of sharing. A curriculum written for Partners in Parenting Education.** Denver, CO: How to Read Your Baby. Chapter 6, “Attachment.”