

BONDING

Bonding is a closeness (the feeling of love, caring, and concern) for another person. It has a cementing effect and must be nourished for it to endure. It happens during the everyday life of a child. There is no spectacular event which causes it to happen. It is the simple day-to-day interactions that formulate this cementing between parent and infant and continues throughout the life cycle.

Feeding, touching, and playing are the three basic elements of bonding. All three occur or should occur several times, everyday in an infant's life. As parents bathe or change diapers, they touch the child and he/she becomes familiar with them and trusts them. Within weeks after birth the infant has longer periods of awake time and begins to look about and explore the world. The parents should interact with the child by transmitting feelings of warmth and love.

Can you think of any examples in your families of how bonding takes place?

- * Parents cooing and making funny faces.
- * Parents whispering or singing softly to a cranky child
- * Grandparents playing and encouraging the babies to babble.
"Are you trying to tell me a story? Well, go ahead and tell me all about it."
- * Brothers or sisters walking their fingers up the baby's body while singing "Itsy Bitsy Spider."

All of these seemingly crazy behaviors are the very things bonding is made of.

It does not happen overnight—it happens over time and it is one of the most critical needs of your child.

Having the father present during delivery is believed to make him bond better with the new child.

The fact that the mother has carried the child for nine months and has felt it move and watched it grow inside her, makes a very natural bond. This is why it is very difficult for mothers to give their babies up for adoption.

Premature babies may not be as tightly bonded to the parents because of the time of separation from birth until they are able to go home and be with the family.

Studies have shown that even though premature babies sometimes cannot be held by their parents, the newest incubators have sterile glove type openings for the parents and medical staff to touch and caress the babies. This seems to help the children thrive and increase bonding by the parents.

Other factors that may negatively affect bonding:

- The very expensive child (parents may be financially in debt for years paying for the hospital and doctor bills).

- The very cross or colicky child (parents do not get the rest and sleep they need).

- If the wife is sick after delivery, she may resent the baby.

- If the mother refuses the sexual advances of the father, the father may resent the child.

- If the child looks like someone the parents do not like, they may resent it.

At the University of Wisconsin, Dr. Harry Harlow did an experiment on bonding. He used monkeys as his subjects. The monkeys were fed by an artificial wire monkey. However, there was a terrycloth monkey in the cage, too. Even though they got no food from the terrycloth monkey, they preferred it to the wire one. The conclusion was made that warmth and softness help in the bonding process.

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many children in orphanages died from a disease they called MARASMUS. This term means, wasting away. When researching this situation, they found that the infants had plenty of food and medical care. The thing they lacked was having someone touch them. Because of this study, institutions today practice mothering children (picking up the baby, rocking the baby, carrying it around, etc.). At one hospital, the death rate for infants fell to below 10% (it had been 30-35%).

Touch is also related to increasing a child's mental functioning, not just physical health.

(Information adapted from "Looking Out/Looking In", 3rd Edition, Holt, Rinehart, Winston, Ronald B. Adler, Neil Towne, page 273.)

THOSE WHO DON'T BOND

While some children fail to thrive (and actually die) from lack of touch and bonding, there are many people in our society today who have not bonded. Many of them are presently housed in our prisons. The book *High Risk: Children Without A Conscience* by Dr. Ken Magid and Carole A. McKelvey looks at this problem in our country.