

NURTURING/BONDING INTRODUCTION:

Bonding is the formation of close emotional ties. Many experts believe that lifelong emotional ties are formed between parents and the newborn soon after birth. This emotional attachment, or feeling of belonging, is important to the social and emotional well-being of the child.

Because of the importance of this bonding process, the baby is often placed in the mother's arms immediately following birth and before the routine medical procedures are performed. It is just as important for the parents to bond to the child as it is for the child to bond to the parents. These moments of touching and caressing and interacting through sight, sound, and touch will build a strong base for lifelong feelings of attachment and belonging.

Bonding is as important for the father as it is for the mother. The mother, who has carried the baby for nine months inside of her body, has most likely already formed strong feelings and ties for the baby. The father, if he has been very involved in the pregnancy and birth, may also have already formed ties, although not as strong, with the baby. Following birth, the father needs opportunities to hold, caress, and interact with the baby. If other family members are present, they may also benefit from holding and touching the baby.

Bonding is not limited to the first few moments following birth. There are babies who for medical reasons, such as being premature, must receive immediate attention and be placed in incubators and cannot be held and caressed immediately following birth. Bonding is still possible and can occur at a later point. Babies are placed in incubators with a round opening in the side. These openings allow parents to reach inside and touch their baby when the baby cannot be removed and held.

Bonding is the emergence of profound love between a parent and child. This affection makes parents respond to a child's every need despite any physical sacrifice of their own. The bond begins even during the first few minutes of life, but bonding is a lifelong process.

Looking into your baby's eyes lets the baby know that he/she has your attention, that you love him/her, and that he/she can trust you. These loving looks should take place during feedings, as well as any time you hold your baby close. The infant's eyes tell you how he/she feels as well.

Handling and touching the baby in calm gentle ways lets the baby feel your love and concern. Babies are in-tune to nonverbal communication and can sense when you are angry or nervous by the way you hold them--you cannot fake your feelings. (You may want to demonstrate this concept by showing the students that even they can sense emotions through nonverbal communication. Walk around with your hands in fists. Discuss how they can tell when someone is in a bad mood or angry.)

Parents should be consistent to allow the baby to know what to expect. If parents have a fixed yet flexible daily routine, they will feel more secure. Responding to a baby's needs quickly also helps the baby feel your consistency and helps the bond grow.

Being responsive to a child means letting the child take the lead and then acting in a way that matches the child's behavior. For example, if the child claps, clap with him/her. If the child burps, act surprised. If the child makes fussy cries that seem to say, "Play with me," then play with the child. Paying attention and being responsive lets the child know that they are loved and important. Being responsive does not mean that the child gets everything that he/she wants. When a child asks for something he/she cannot or should not have, a parent should acknowledge the request and offer another alternative or set of choices.

When parents are in-tune and sensitive to their child, they try to see things from the child's point of view. They are consciously aware of the signals the baby or child is sending. These signals can be sent in the form of a facial expression, crying, or body language.

Being sensitive also entails allowing the child to take the lead in many situations. For example, a parent shows a toy to a child and the child turns away from it and slaps his/her hand at it. The parent should then be sensitive to what the child appears to be saying. "I don't want to play with that toy." Forcing or continuing to show the child the toy could make the child angry and lead to feelings of frustration.