

ABRAZO ADOPTION INSTITUTE, FIRST QUARTER

Please read the following information, which is about bonding and attachment. Each parent-to-be must read these materials using a highlighter to identify the information most important to each of them. Then detach the reading for later reference, and complete the Review, returning it to Abrazo within 2 weeks of receipt, to meet Licensing requirements regarding pre-placement education and training.

What is **attachment**?

- A connection between one person and another, in which
- The relationship provides safety, comfort and pleasure, and
- The loss or threat of loss of the person evokes intense distress.

The biological capacity to bond and form attachments is genetically determined. It is the nature, quantity, pattern and intensity of early life experiences that express the genetic potential. The “normal range” ability and quality of attachment for human beings varies greatly.

But how important is it, really?

Very. Attachment matters because it impacts the child’s

- A:** Attainment of self-reliance
- T:** Ability to think logically
- T:** Ability to trust
- A:** Ability to cope with adversity, stress and frustration
- C:** Development of conscience
- H:** Ability to handle fear and worry
- M:** Full mental and intellectual potential
- E:** Emotional stability and the development of relationships
- N:** Necessary development of motor skills, language processing, social behavior
- T:** Ability to handle any perceived threat to self

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics: *“To develop into a psychologically healthy human being, a child must have a relationship with an adult who is nurturing, protective, and fosters trust and security. Attachment refers to this relationship between two people and forms the basis for long-term relationships or bonds with other persons. Attachment is an active process—it can be secure or insecure, maladaptive or productive. Attachment to a primary caregiver is essential to the development of emotional security and social conscience.”*

Ok. I get it.

So, then, what’s all this have to do with **bonding**?

- Bonding is the process of forming an attachment.
- It is a set of behaviors which help lead to an emotional connection.

The most important avenues for bonding are all interactions based on positive and appropriate physical contact between a parent and a child. These interactions produce neurochemical activities in the brain which lead to normal organization of brain systems that are responsible for attachment.

Bonding experiences which produce attachment include: holding, rocking, singing, feeding, gazing, kissing, and other nurturing behaviors involved in caring for infants and children... time together, face-to-face interactions, eye contact, physical proximity, touch, and other primary sensory experiences, such as smell, sound and taste.

Dr. Bruce Perry, author of Bonding & Attachment in Maltreated Children: Consequences of Emotional Neglect in Childhood, says *“The brain systems responsible for healthy emotional relationships will not develop in an optimal way without the right kinds of experiences at the right times in life.”*

This is why timing is everything.

During the first three years of life, the human brain develops to 90% of its adult size and puts in place the majority of systems and structures that determine all future emotional, behavioral, social and psychological functioning for a lifetime. There are several critical periods during which bonding must occur in order for the brain system responsible for attachment to develop normally. While experts do not know exactly when these periods are, given the differences between children and their developmental process, the 1st year seems to be critical for attachment to the primary caregiver; the 7th year seems to be critical for attachment to a primary same-sex friendship, and the first year of puberty (usually during seventh grade) seems most critical for opposite sex relationships.

Evergreen Family Counseling Center director Mark Henningsen says: *“The first year of life is a year of needs. When the infant has a need, it initiates attachment behavior in order to summon a nurturing response from its attachment figure. The need/gratifying response usually includes touch, eye contact, movement, smiles and lactose. When gratification occurs, trust is built. This cycle occurs hundreds of times a week, and thousands of times in the first year. From this relationship, a synchronicity and reciprocity develops between parent and child. The caregiver develops a greater awareness of their child and learns just how to respond. The child develops good “cause and effect” thinking, feels powerful, trusts others, shows exploratory behavior, and develops empathy and conscience.”*

All right, so what **other factors** influence bonding and attachment?

- The infant or child’s personality and temperament
- The caregivers’ behaviors (critical, rejecting or interfering parents tend to raise children who avoid emotional intimacy)
- Living in a continual environment of fear
- The “fit” between the temperament and capabilities of the child and the mother is crucial.

And if you’re still not convinced that homework like this really matters, read this! **“The majority of attachment problems are generally due to parental ignorance about development, and *not* abuse.”**

The ultimate goal of parenting must be to prepare a child for the real world and help them learn to learn.

Dad's Name: _____ Today's Date: _____

1) List the potential risks for a child whose parents *don't* successfully learn to bond with him/her?

2) Which of your wife's parents did she feel a greater attachment to, as a child, and why?

3) How would you describe your wife's temperament and capabilities? And why is this relevant?

4) What early life experience most influenced your own genetic potential for attachment and why?

5) For all the jokes about "male bonding," what kinds of things can you do as a father to develop the best possible attachment with the child you are about to adopt?

Mom's Name: _____ Today's Date: _____

1) What parallels can be drawn between parent-child bonding and spousal attachment, if any?

2) With which of your husband's parents was he more bonded, as a child, and why?

3) If you were painting a portrait of a healthy attachment between mother and infant, what would we see pictured within that masterpiece that indicates a good bond exists?

4) Which year of life is most critical for parent-child attachment, according to this reading, and what accommodations to your schedule will you and your spouse make to accommodate your future child's needs during this time period?

5) In what ways do you think adoption potentially impacts the bonding and attachment process between parents and children, if any? How might openness enhance "fit"? What does your homestudy worker have to say about this?
