The most important property of humankind is the capacity to form and maintain relationships. These relationships are absolutely necessary for any of us to survive, learn, work, love, and procreate. Human relationships take many forms but the most intense, most pleasurable, and most painful are those relationships with family, friends and loved ones. Within this inner circle of intimate relationships, we are bonded to each other with "emotional glue" --bonded with love.

Each individual's ability to form and maintain relationships using this "emotional glue" is different. Some people seem "naturally" capable of loving. They form numerous intimate and caring relationships and, in doing so, get pleasure. Others are not so lucky. They feel no "pull" to form intimate relationships, find little pleasure in being with or close to others. They have less emotional glue with family and few, if any, friends. In extreme cases, an individual may have no intact emotional bond to any other person. They are self-absorbed, aloof, or may even present with classic neuropsychiatric signs of being schizoid or autistic.

How do we develop the ability to connect with others? Why are some attachments stronger than others? What are the warning signs that a child has an impaired ability to attach? What can poor attachment mean and why is it important in our society?

In considering these questions, we must remember that the combination of variables that may affect attachment ability vary widely from person to person, even among siblings within the same family. As our individual characteristics and our environmental influences interact, there are innumerable variations in how people approach, perceive, connect, and maintain relationships with others.

The capacity and desire to form emotional relationships is related to the organization and functioning of specific parts of the human brain. Just as the brain allows us to see, smell, taste, think, talk, and move, it is the organ that allows us to love...or not. The systems in the human brain that allow us to form and maintain emotional relationships develop during infancy and the first years of life. Experiences during this early, vulnerable period of life are critical to shaping the capacity to form intimate and emotionally healthy relationships.

The main predictor of how well your child will do in school and in life is the strength of the relationship he or she has with you, the parent or primary caretaker. This relationship impacts your child's future mental, physical, social, and emotional health. It is not founded on quality of care or parental love, but on the nonverbal emotional communication between child and parent known as the attachment bond. While it's easiest to form this secure attachment bond with an infant, it can be formed at any time or at any age.
Why is the attachment bond so important?

A landmark report, published in 2000 by The Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development, identified how crucial the attachment bond is to a child’s development. This form of communication affects the way your child develops mentally, physically, intellectually, emotionally, and socially. While attachment occurs naturally as you, the parent or caretaker, care for your baby’s needs, the quality of the attachment bond varies.

- A secure attachment bond ensures that your child will feel secure, understood, and be calm enough to experience optimal development of his or her nervous system. Your child’s developing brain organizes itself to provide your child with the best foundation for life: a feeling of safety that results in eagerness to learn, healthy self-awareness, trust, and empathy.

- An insecure attachment bond fails to meet your child’s need for security, understanding, and calm, preventing the child’s developing brain from organizing itself in the best ways. This can inhibit emotional, mental, and even physical development, leading to difficulties in learning and forming relationships in later life.

Developing a secure attachment bond between you and your child, and giving your child the best start in life, does not require you to be a perfect parent. In fact, the 2000 study found that the critical aspect of the child–primary caretaker relationship is NOT based on quality of care, educational input, or even the bond of love that develops between parent and infant. Rather, it is based on the quality of the nonverbal communication process that takes place between you and your child.

Your baby needs more than love

As a parent or primary caretaker for your infant, you can follow all the traditional parenting guidelines, provide doting, around-the-clock care for your baby, and yet still not achieve a secure attachment bond. You can tend to your child’s every physical need, provide the most comfortable home, the highest quality nourishment, the best education, and all the material goods a child could wish for. You can hold, cuddle, and adore your child without creating the kind of attachment that fosters the best development for your child.

How is it possible to do such a good job of meeting a child’s physical needs and yet have a child that does not have a secure attachment and may suffer developmentally?

The bond of love differs from the attachment bond

Since the 1960s, many books, articles, and online sources have encouraged parents to bond with their babies by investing more time and energy in taking care of their child. However, children need something more than love and caregiving in order for their brains and nervous systems to develop in the best way possible.

Children need to be able to engage in a nonverbal emotional exchange with their primary caretaker in a way that communicates their needs and makes them feel
understood, secure, and balanced. Children who feel emotionally disconnected from their primary caregiver are likely to feel confused, misunderstood, and insecure.

While it’s easiest to form a secure attachment bond when your child is still an infant—and reliant upon nonverbal means of communicating—you can begin to make your child feel understood and secure at any age. Children’s brains continue maturing well into adulthood (until their mid-20s). Moreover, because the brain continues to change throughout life, it’s never too late to start engaging in a nonverbal emotional exchange with your child. In fact, developing your nonverbal communication skills can help improve and deepen your relationships with other people of any age.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Difference Between Bonding and a Secure Attachment Bond</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bonding . . .</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refers to your feelings for and sense of connection to your child that begins before birth and usually develops very quickly in the first weeks after the baby is born.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is task-oriented. You attend to your child’s needs, whether it’s changing diapers and feeding, or taking to soccer practice and the movies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You maintain your regular adult pace while attending to your child. For example, you hurry to feed your child dinner so you have time to watch your favorite TV show, or you cut short playing a game with your child to answer a text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You as the parent initiate interaction with your child. For example, you want to get a cute photo of your baby laughing so you initiate play time, or you make your teen his favorite meal so he’ll tell you how things are going at school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You focus on future goals by, for example, wanting to get a cute photo of your baby laughing so you initiate play time, or you make your teen his favorite meal so he’ll tell you how things are going at school.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Difference Between Bonding and a Secure Attachment Bond

Example, trying to do everything you can to have the smartest, healthiest child. Experience, just enjoying connecting with your child. You listen, talk, or play with your child, giving your full, focused attention in ways that feel comfortable to him or her, without distractions, so you can just be “in the moment.”

Why there is so much confusion about bonding and the secure attachment bond?
The words bond or bonding are commonly used to describe both caretaking and the emotional exchange that forms the attachment process, even though they are very different ways of connecting with your child.

- One is a connection based on the care a parent provides for infant child, while the other is based on the quality of nonverbal emotional communication that occurs between parent and child.

- Both types of parent-child interaction can occur simultaneously. While feeding, bathing, or otherwise caring for your child, you can also build the emotional connection by recognizing and responding to your child’s nonverbal cues.

- Before experts understood the radical changes going on in the infant brain during the first months and years of life, both the caretaking process and the attachment process looked very similar. Now, though, they are able to recognize and painstakingly record an infant’s nonverbal responses to highlight the process of attachment in infants.

Obstacles to creating a secure attachment bond
Obstacles to creating a secure attachment may first appear when your child is an infant. You may deeply love your baby, yet be ill-equipped to meet the needs of an infant’s immature nervous system. Since infants cannot calm and soothe themselves, they rely on you to do so for them. However, if you’re unable to manage your own stress, to quickly regain your calm and focus in the face of life’s daily stressors, you’ll be unable to calm and soothe your baby.

Even an older child will look to you, the parent, as a source of safety and connection and, ultimately, secure attachment. If, however, you are frequently depressed, anxious, angry, grieving, pre-occupied, or otherwise unable to be calm and present for your child, his or her physical, emotional, and/or intellectual development may suffer.
The new field of infant mental health, with its emphasis on brain research and the developmental role of parents, provides a clearer understanding of factors that may compromise the secure attachment bond. If either the primary caretaker or the child has a health problem, nonverbal communication between the two may be affected, which in turn can affect the secure attachment bond.

How an infant’s well-being can affect the secure attachment bond

Experience shapes the brain and this is especially true for newborns whose nervous systems are largely undeveloped.

- When a baby experiences difficulty in the womb or in the birth process—during a cesarean birth, for example—his or her nervous system may be compromised.

- Adopted babies or those who spend time in hospital neonatal units away from a parent may have early life experiences that leave them feeling stressed, confused, and unsafe.

- Infants who never seem to stop crying—whose eyes are always tightly closed, fists clenched, and bodies rigid—may have difficulty experiencing the soothing cues of even a highly attuned caretaker.

Fortunately, as the infant brain is so undeveloped and influenced by experience, a child can overcome any difficulties at birth. It may take a few months, but if the primary caretaker remains calm, focused, understanding, and persistent, a baby will eventually relax enough for the secure attachment process to occur.

How an older child’s well-being can affect the secure attachment bond

A child’s experience and environment can affect his or her ability to form a secure attachment bond. Sometimes the circumstances that affect the secure attachment bond are unavoidable, but the child is too young to understand what has happened and why. To a child, it just feels like no one cares and they lose trust in others and the world becomes an unsafe place.

- A child gets attention only by acting out or displaying other extreme behaviors.

- Sometimes the child’s needs are met and sometimes they aren’t. The child never knows what to expect.

- A child is hospitalized or separated from his or her parents.

- A child is moved from one caregiver to another (can be the result of adoption, foster care, or the loss of a parent).

- A child is mistreated or abused.
How a caretaker’s well-being can affect the secure attachment bond

The feelings you experience as a primary caretaker can shape the developmental process rapidly occurring in your child’s brain.

If you are overly stressed, depressed, traumatized, or unavailable for whatever reason, you may not have the awareness or sensitivity to provide the positive emotional mirroring a child needs for secure attachment.

Sometimes even a healthy, caring, and responsible caretaker may have trouble understanding and initiating a secure attachment bond with their child. If, as a child, you didn’t experience a secure attachment bond with your own primary caregiver, you may be unaware of what secure attachment looks or feels like. But adults can change for the better, too. Just as you can strengthen yourself with exercise and a healthy diet, you can also learn to manage overwhelming stress and deal with emotions that may interfere with your ability to create a secure attachment bond.

Repair of the secure attachment bond is always possible

You don’t have to be a perfect parent to build a secure attachment bond with your infant—no one is able to be fully present and attentive to a child 24 hours a day. Because the brain is capable of changing, repair is always possible and may even strengthen the secure attachment bond.

If you notice there’s a disconnect between you, when you’ve missed or misinterpreted your child’s cues, and attempt to repair it by continuing to figure out what your child needs, the secure attachment process will stay on track. The effort involved in repair can even deepen trust, increase resiliency, and build a stronger relationship.

Distractions of daily life

Cell phones, computers, TV, and countless other distractions of daily life can prevent you from paying full attention to your child. Responding to an urgent email during meal time, texting a friend during play time, or just zoning out in front of the TV with your child are all ways parents miss out on opportunities to make eye contact with their child and engage in the secure attachment process. Without eye contact and your full attention you’ll miss your child’s nonverbal cues.

Nonverbal communication tips for secure attachment

Nonverbal cues are sensory signals communicated by a certain tone of voice, a particular touch, or a particular facial expression. A child’s primary caretaker brings all of these unique qualities together creating a sense of recognition, safety, and comfort for a child. Even when a child is old enough to talk, nonverbal communication remains key to building and maintaining a secure attachment.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Nonverbal Cues and How They Can be Used to Create a Secure Attachment Bond</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eye contact</strong> – You look at child affectionately and he or she picks up on the positive emotion conveyed by this nonverbal signal and feels safe, relaxed, and happy. If you’re depressed, stressed, or distracted, you may not look directly into your child’s eyes at all. Maintaining eye contact also plays an important role in sustaining the flow of conversation between you and your child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Facial expression</strong> – Your face is able to express countless emotions without you saying a word. If your expression is calm and attentive when you communicate with your child, he or she will feel secure. But if your face looks distressed, angry, worried, sad, fearful, or distracted your child will pick up on these negative emotions and feel stressed, unsafe, and unsure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tone of voice</strong> – Even if your child is too young to understand the words that you use, he or she can understand the difference between a tone that is harsh, indifferent, or preoccupied and a tone that conveys tenderness, interest, concern, and understanding. When talking to older children, make sure that the tone you use matches what you’re saying.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Touch</strong> – The way you touch your child conveys your emotional state—whether you’re attentive, calm, tender, relaxed, or disinterested, upset, and unavailable. The way you wash, lift, or carry your baby or the way you give your older child a warm hug, a gentle touch on the arm, or a reassuring pat on the back can convey so much emotion to your child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Body language</strong> – Talk to your child with your arms crossed and your head back and your child will see you as defensive and uninterested. But sit with a relaxed, open posture, leaning towards your child and your child will feel what he or she is saying matters to you. The way you sit, move, and carry yourself communicates a wealth of information to your child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pacing, timing, and intensity</strong> – The pacing, timing, and intensity of your speech, movements, and facial expressions can reflect your state of mind. If you maintain an adult pace, or are stressed or otherwise inattentive, your nonverbal actions will do little to calm, soothe, or reassure your child. You need to be aware of your child’s preferences for pacing and intensity, which are often slower and less forceful than your own.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Find Article at: [http://www.helpguide.org/mental/bonding_attachment_bond.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/mental/bonding_attachment_bond.htm)