



Strengthening attachment:

For Parents and Caregivers

From the beginning of life a child has an inbuilt strong need to be close and form attachments to others. Recognising these needs is obvious - the infant cry calls to attention all around to listen and respond.



When a child attaches closely with a caregiver there starts a journey that the two go on together. Young people need protection, nurturance and comfort, but the capacity of those around, and the reality of a complex world, mean that no child can ever have a 'perfect' beginning.

Experts in child development wisely state that the goal is to be 'good enough' in caregiving. This falls between 'perfect' and 'inadequate' - but fulfils the requirement to give the child a good start in life. In terms of priorities, attending to a young person's attachment needs for love, protection and care remains the fundamental goal of 'good enough' caregiving. These principles remain the same into adolescence and young adulthood.

There are a number of ways to be 'good enough' - here are some key principles:

- Establish child safety as a priority every day
- Spend enjoyable time together. For example infants need to be held close while older children may enjoy shared meals and games
- Show warmth and affection - especially at the start of the day and at separations and reunions
- Follow the child's lead to notice what they need from clues in their behaviour and feelings

- Talk with the child about their feelings and listen to the things they say
- Work on seeing things from the child's point of view
- Balance being warm and close with the child, and giving them space to explore the world. Keep a watchful eye over them, know what they are doing, but also let them make mistakes and learn from their experience as long as they are safe
- To feel safe, children need to know that their caregivers are in charge. It is normal for children to challenge their caregivers - this testing lets them know that it is right to trust their caregiver's authority. Give children responsibility for safe areas of their life that increase their independence and self-esteem.
- Notice the child's positive behaviours and comment on these each day

Being a caregiver is challenging, but being 'good enough' will help the child to successfully navigate their major developmental milestones. Having a good relationship can be a most rewarding experience in a person's life.

Project Air Strategy acknowledges the major support of NSW Health and MH-Children and Young People, Mental Health Drug and Alcohol Office, NSW Ministry of Health. The Project works with mental health clinicians, consumers and carers to deliver effective treatments, implements research strategies supporting scientific discoveries, and offers high quality training and education. Contact us at info-projectair@uow.edu.au or visit www.projectairstrategy.org