

Ask the Pediatrician: Bonding with your baby

August 14 2023, by Dr. Arthur Lavin, American Academy of Pediatrics



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Bonding is the process of creating a loving, healthy attachment with your child. Many new parents feel a unique relationship beginning the moment they lay eyes on their baby. But even though you might assume bonding happens in an instant, it's actually a gradual process that unfolds over time.

As you and your little one get to know each other, a sense of safety and comfort will develop. Babies are built to bond. This feeling of security will prepare your child to form healthy, supportive relationships in the wider world.

Whether you give birth in the hospital, at home, in a birthing center or you welcome your child as [adoptive parents](#), special moments can enhance bonding.

Holding your baby close, especially skin to skin, creates a feeling of security and closeness. Your infant will become accustomed to your scent, your voice and your touch while they're in your arms. A soft baby carrier is another way to keep your newborn close while you move around, read or relax.

Feeding is a warm, intimate time when you may feel especially close to your child. Whether you're breastfeeding or bottle-feeding, you will enjoy holding your baby and watching their body movements and expressions. Observing your baby closely helps you learn signals that communicate comfort, satisfaction or distress. Gradually, you'll be able to "read" your baby and anticipate what they may need next: a hug, a fresh diaper or a soft lullaby to help them drift back to sleep.

Make eye contact with your baby, offering smiles and sounds that convey your love. You'll find your baby delights in hearing your voice, seeing and feeling your body movements and watching your facial expressions.

Don't be afraid to comfort your infant when they cry. It's a myth that [babies](#) are "spoiled" by a loving parent's attention. In fact, responding to your child's distress builds trust and security. And while conditions like colic—which can cause at least three hours of crying per day, three or more days per week—can be frightening and exhausting, with the right

support you will be able to navigate this brief stage in your child's development.

When you are home with our new baby, your job is to meet their needs. The household needs attention, but you'll be able to focus on your baby if you let other people help out. Say yes when friends and family volunteer to handle the laundry, groceries and cooking. It might be hard to let go of things you've always handled yourself, but it means you'll be fully present for more giggles, wiggles and heart-melting smiles.

Babies naturally bond with their parents, but they can also develop close attachments with other people who regularly, lovingly care for them and make them feel safe. This close circle may include grandparents, paid caregivers, other family members and friends. Bonding with more than one person helps your child learn about trust and closeness. It also makes things easier for you and your partner, if you have one, to manage careers, chores and more.

Another way to bond with your baby is to consider reading and singing to your baby before they're born. Before they're born, babies can hear sounds outside their mother's body at around 27 to 29 weeks, or six to seven months. After they're born, familiar songs and stories (and the sound of your voice) can bring them comfort. If you're parenting with a partner, invite them to read and sing to your baby, too—it's a delightful way to get ready for your child's arrival.

Play with your baby once you bring them home. It's not only fun, but also a great way to enrich the bond between you. Finger puppets, colorful board books and soft toys with sound-makers inside will surprise and delight your baby. Playing peekaboo, reading and singing to your child are great ways to share the stories and tunes you loved when you were little.

If the cozy picture we're describing here feels far from your experience, don't worry. Bonding doesn't require you to be a perfect parent. There's no right or wrong way to do it, and many things can get in the way, such as recovering from a long or difficult birth, sleep deprivation or depression. Adoptive parents experience depression, too, as do partners, so keep an eye out for signs that one or both of you need professional help to regain your balance.

Please don't shame yourself if you feel sad, anxious and unsteady right now. Parenthood is challenging. It triggers intense feelings and places huge demands on people.

It may help you to know that 50% to 80% of all [new parents](#) experience the "baby blues," causing serious mood swings that last for two to three weeks after a newborn's arrival. Around 1 in 8 of all parents develop [postpartum depression](#), a more serious condition that requires treatment.

Your baby comes to you more than eager to connect. While parenting is not without its worries, interruptions and struggles, rest assured: Bonding happens when you simply let it happen.

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