

Close to You

Steps **YOU** can take to build strong ties with your young child

Parental sensitivity is like a key mothers and fathers can use to open the door to a warm and secure relationship with their young child. Research findings show that certain features of parental sensitivity are especially valuable in helping develop and strengthen this important parent-child bond.

When interacting with their babies and young children, parents should interact in ways that:

- Recognize their child's efforts to interact;
- Involve taking turns and are rewarding for both parent and child;
- Involve the parent in warmly assisting, guiding, encouraging, and supporting their child.

The interactions that are part of parent-child play naturally include these features. That's why spending time with your baby enjoying simple play activities and baby learning games is so important. Babies and young children delight in lap games like pat-a-cake and peek-a-boo that involve sharing simple rhyming chants and movements with Mommy or Daddy. Little ones also love finger plays like "The Eensy-Weensy Spider" and "Where Is Thumbkin?" What can be better than sitting securely on a parent's knee and bouncing to the sing-song rhythms of Mother Goose rhymes? "Ride a cock horse to Banbury Cross to see a fine lady upon a white horse..."

You don't even need to set aside a special time for this kind of relationship-enhancing play. It can happen quite easily as part of everyday routines. Spice up car rides or diaper-changing and dressing times with favorite games. Play together as baby rides along facing you in your shopping cart. Play back-and-forth during meals. You'll grow closer—and have fun!



Spending one-to-one time with his young daughter, talking and playing simple games, helps Dad develop the sensitivity and awareness that are keys to building a strong and secure parent-child relationship.



An infant's face registers the joy of closeness with Mommy as he responds to her smiling face, warm eye contact, and happy words during a diaper change.

More opportunities ...

Taking turns is a valuable way to build closeness between parent and young child. The wonderful thing is, you can practice taking turns doing just about anything ... the more fun it is, the better! Try these activities:

Whenver you find yourselves near a wide mirror—in the bathroom after a diaper change, for example, or when putting away clothes in the drawers of a mirror-topped dresser—hold baby up so she can see both her face and yours in the glass. Point out her reflection and ask, “What can baby do?” As soon as she moves or makes an interesting expression, copy it and say, “Look! Just like you!” Repeat several times, trying different actions. Once she’s “caught on” to this game and enjoys it, try reversing the roles. This time the parent makes a funny face, blows a raspberry, wiggles fingers, or does something else and then helps baby mimic the action. Of course this can be played face to face, but the mirror adds to the fun by letting baby see her own part in the game.

As you handle household items as part of everyday chores, take turns using them as rhythm instruments: washtub drums, oatmeal-box bongos, pot-lid cymbals, soup-spoon chimes, etc. Take turns playing your instruments: “I’ll play, then you play.... Now it’s your turn!”

Take turns handing, rolling, tossing, kicking, or in any way passing interesting objects (balls, finger foods, toys, a handkerchief, etc.) back and forth with your young child. Take turns “burying” and then “finding” a brightly colored sock in a basket full of clean white clothes at the laundromat or hiding a small toy under a napkin at mealtime. “Where did it go? Oh, Look! Here it is!”

Build a tower of blocks and take turns gleefully knocking it down.

Include friends, grandparents, and older brothers and sisters in turn-taking activities with baby.

When enjoying a meal or snack together, take turns eating morsels or doling out servings in one-for-me/one-for-you fashion. For example, you could take turns eating cereal pieces or small crackers from a dish.

Or you could slice a banana, dividing it between your two plates, going back and forth, one piece at a time.

*This little piggy went to market,
This little piggy stayed home ...*

Parent-child games that combine gentle touch and/or movement with giggle-producing, pleasing words or songs are tried-and-true bonding activities. If you’ve forgotten the words to traditional finger (or toe!) plays, or if you’d enjoy trying some new ones, you’ll find complete descriptions in books like: *Nursery Songs and Lap Games* by Pamela Kennedy, Stephen Elkins, and Joan Covell (Ideals Publications, 1990); *Pocketful of Stars: Songs, Chants, and Lap Games* by Felicity Williams and Michael Martchenko (Annick Press, 1997), *The Lap-Time Song and Play Book* by Jane Yolen and Adam Stemple (Harcourt, 1989), and *Bounce Bounce Bounce: A Lap Game Book for Babies* and *Bumpety Bump: A Lap Game Book for Babies*, both by Kathy Henderson and Carol Thompson (Candlewick Press, 1994). Ask your librarian to recommend his or her favorites!



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