



The Eight Ideals of Attachment Parenting

1. Preparation for childbirth

Connecting early with baby begins with prenatal preparation and alert, active participation in childbirth. You can make informed decisions about the kind of birth you want that will help create a positive experience for you and your baby.

- Make a commitment to maintain a strong relationship with your partner - Discuss your parenting philosophies beforehand. Whether or not the parents live together, it is very important that the needs and welfare of the baby come first when making decisions.
- Preconception education - When possible, prepare yourself mentally, physically and spiritually before conceiving a child. Read, ask questions and take good care of yourself by eating a nutritious diet and exercising regularly.
- Pregnancy - Create a peaceful womb environment by avoiding stress. Mother's feelings and experiences impact the developing infant.
- Choose conscious parenting - Go into parenting with knowledge and understanding.
- Be alert and active in your baby's birth - Prepare yourself, learn what to expect and understand what your options are. Generally, the less invasive the birth, the better it is for mother and baby.
- Attend childbirth and breastfeeding classes – They are important in helping empower parents to make informed decisions.

2. Emotional responsiveness

Understanding and responding sensitively to your infant's emotional needs is the cornerstone of Attachment Parenting. Remember that crying is your infant's way of telling you s/he is distressed. Building a strong attachment or connection with your baby is more than just caring for the baby's physical needs, but also involves spending enjoyable time interacting with your baby or child on a daily basis. The attachment process is greatly enhanced when parents' initiate play and lively interactions.

- Don't be afraid to fall in love with your baby.
- The common cues or reasons for crying include hunger, tiredness, discomfort, and loneliness.

Other reasons for crying:

1. Stress from too much stimulation
2. Picking up on mother's stress
3. Needs to be held or laid down
4. Needs skin to skin contact to feel secure
5. Gas and/or colic
6. "High-need" is a term that is used to describe the temperament of a baby who is often fussy. These infants may need a lot of close physical contact, movement or loving attention. They may also be sensitive to certain solid foods or foods ingested by the mother.



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3. Breastfeed your baby

Breastfeeding meets baby's need for optimum nutrition and physical contact. Breastfeeding has many benefits to the baby, mother, and society and is the most natural way to meet so many of your baby's physical needs. While breastfeeding is the ideal way to feed a baby, parents who are not breastfeeding can still practice Attachment Parenting. We encourage parents who bottle-feed to use "breastfeeding" behaviors. In other words, hold your baby when feeding, talk to your baby and change positions during the feeding. Avoid the temptation to prop the baby's bottle since your baby will greatly benefit from your touch and holding.

- Advantages to mother and family:
 1. Saves money - enough in one year to buy a major appliance
 2. Saves time - no formula to prepare or bottles to wash
 3. Convenient for home or travel
 4. Triggers mothering hormones that promote attachment behaviors and calms mother
 5. Helps mother can get more rest
 6. Helps protect mother against breast cancer
- Advantages to baby:
 1. Biologically designed for the human infant, contains needed nutrients in the proper amounts, digests easily
 2. Gives immunity to certain diseases and viruses
 3. Protects against some cancers, according to the newest research
 4. Keeps baby close to mother and provides comfort
 5. Helps strengthen jaws, eyes and formation of teeth
 6. Less likely to develop allergies
- Avoid clock/calendar parenting. Follow your baby's cues rather than the clock or calendar.
- Weaning is a mutual process determined by the readiness of the baby and mother ("Cooperative weaning"). The World Health Organization (W.H.O.) code recommends breastfeeding until at least two years of age or beyond.
- If bottle-feeding, use breastfeeding behaviors:
 1. Hold your infant when feeding, never prop the bottle.
 2. Make good eye contact at those times when your baby is alert and interested.
 3. Switch positions from one side to another; this helps strengthen the baby's eyes.
 4. Talk lovingly to your baby at feeding times.



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4. Baby Wearing and Nurturing Touch

“Wearing” baby, by holding or use of soft carriers that keep baby close, meets baby’s need for physical contact, security, stimulation and movement; all of which promote optimal brain development. Carried babies cry less too. Nurturing touch through the use of infant massage is another excellent way to calm baby and enhance baby’s development.

- Babywearing helps satisfy the baby’s need for closeness, touch and affection.
- Babywearing promotes and strengthens parents’ emotional bond with their baby.
- The movement that naturally results from carrying your baby stimulates their neurological development.
- Babies cry less when worn or held.
- Holding helps regulate their temperature and heart rate.
- Baby feels more secure.
- If you don’t “wear”, be aware:
 1. To hold your infant as often as possible (especially if bottle-feeding).
 2. Avoid the overuse of baby devices (swings, pacifiers, jumpers, plastic carriers).
- Babywearing facilitates easy outings and travel.
- Babies who receive nurturing touch through massage, holding, and other forms of loving physical contact gain weight faster, are calmer, and have better intellectual and motor development.

5. Sharing sleep

It is important to be responsive to a baby’s nighttime needs. API advocates keeping baby in close proximity in a safe sleeping environment. In many cultures it is considered normal and expected for parents to sleep with their children. Recent research has shown that some of the benefits include better quality of sleep for mothers and reduced risk of SIDS for babies. Safe bedsharing includes a safe, firm mattress and parents who are not using drugs or alcohol and who do not smoke near baby. If a parent is not comfortable with the idea of bedsharing, remember the key is close proximity and responsiveness to the infant’s nighttime needs.

- Safe bedsharing* requires:
 1. Not smoking around baby
 2. Not using alcohol or drugs
 3. A firm mattress free of fluffy bedding and stuffed animals
 4. Using safety measures such as bed extenders or safe placement of the family bed
 5. Avoiding gaps of any kind, for instance between mattress and bed-frame or side-rails that may easily slide out from the mattress
 6. Never leaving a baby unattended in an adult bed
 7. Never placing a baby to sleep on a couch or chair



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* For more information about safe co-sleeping guidelines, visit our website at www.attachmentparenting.org

- Advantages to baby:
 1. Studies indicate that cultures that co-sleep have reduced incidence of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).
 2. There are more periods of light sleep beneficial to creating stable heart rates and breathing patterns.
 3. Breastfeeding is better established through frequent nursings, which are facilitated by co-sleeping.
 4. Baby feels warm and secure, therefore cries less.
- Advantages to parents:
 1. More sleep
 2. Improves length and quantity of breastfeeding
 3. Mother worries less about her infant.
 4. Parents develop a closer bond to baby.
- If sharing a bed doesn't work for you or your family:
 1. Try other sleep arrangements, especially when there are older siblings:
 - a) Bassinet by the bed
 - b) Side-car: take one side of the crib off and securely place the crib close to parents bed
 - c) Mattress, futon, or sleeping bag on floor for older children
 2. Establish a pleasant bedtime routine:
 - a) Reduce stimulation by turning off the TV; before bedtime avoid giving a baby/child drinks or food containing caffeine such as chocolate milk, soda, tea, or chocolate candy.
 - b) Play soft music.
 - c) Give the baby/child a warm bath.
 - d) Rock, read and/or sing to your baby/child.
 3. Young children who have their own bed will often go to sleep more willingly when parents lie down with them in their bed until they are very drowsy or until they go to sleep. Many parents have found that their children soon outgrow this need and happily go to sleep on their own.

6. Avoid frequent or prolonged separations

Babies have an intense need for the physical presence of a loving, responsive parent. Through daily care and loving interactions strong parent-child attachments are formed. Frequent or prolonged separations can interfere with the development of secure attachments. Try to keep separations down to a minimum when your preverbal baby is young and be responsive to your baby's need for your physical presence. Long separations can cause your baby to go through the stages of grief, and can affect

his/her attachment to you. If separations are inevitable given your situation, then help your child to gradually work towards them. Avoid "caregiver roulette"; continuity of



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care, with a consistent, loving, caregiver, is critical. If you are a working parent you can practice AP when you are home to help you re-connect with your baby.

- Frequent, prolonged separations can impair the attachment process and can have life-long effects on the infant's long-term psychological and emotional development.
- If separations are inevitable, it is extremely important to have continuity of care with a consistent, loving, caregiver. If you must leave the baby, make sure the caregiver is someone who makes the baby's needs their top priority. Tell them how you want your baby to be treated and cared for. Make the transition well in advance so that it is a gradual process and comfortable for the baby.
- "Caregiver roulette" - the frequent turnover of caregivers - can be very damaging to the attachment process.
- When you are reunited with your baby, immerse them in love, attention and affection. This helps you and your baby feel reconnected, strengthening your relationship.

7. Use Positive discipline

Boundaries and limit-setting are necessary as children grow. Positive, non-violent methods of discipline and loving guidance promote the development of self-control and empathy towards others.

- What does the word "discipline" mean? It is derived from the word "disciple" which means one who follows his master's teachings. To discipline is to teach.
- What is positive discipline? Positive discipline begins with an understanding that your long-range goal is to teach your child how to make good decisions as an older child and as an adult. They learn from following good examples and role models. *Become the kind of person you want your child to be.*
- How does Attachment Parenting help in the discipline process?

"The infant who is the product of Attachment Parenting learns that his needs will be met consistently and predictably. The child learns to trust. Trust is the basis of authority, and a trusted authority figure disciplines more effectively." – William Sears, MD

1. AP builds a strong foundation. A child who is raised with love, empathy and affection learns to form a deep trust with his or her parents. A child who has a strong bond of trust is easier to discipline.
 2. Parents are able to empathize with the child and understand the child's point of view.
- It is helpful to learn the stages of child development to understand what is normal, developmentally appropriate behavior in order for you to respond appropriately. These developmental milestones include:



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1. birth to 6 months
2. 6 months to one year
3. 1 year to 3 years
4. 4-5 years
5. pre-adolescent
6. adolescent
7. teenage years

(The Gesell Institute of Human Development has published a series of books for parents on the different stages of child development written by doctors Ames and Ilg such as *Your One Year Old, Your Two Year Old, etc.* Many parents have found these books extremely helpful. Visit our store and order these and other books through our website!)

8. Maintain balance in your family life

Balance is the key to avoiding “parent burn-out” and can be achieved by taking care of yourself through exercise, quiet time and healthy eating. An infant’s needs are intense and immediate, yet a balance can be achieved in meeting baby’s needs, as well as the needs of other family members.

- Whether you are married with several children or a single parent with an only child, it is important to remember that finding balance is the key to a healthy family life. It is important that parents not be isolated. They should seek out support systems within their communities. This can be achieved by creating a type of extended family of like-minded friends, or participating in an API parent-support group that provides opportunities for not only for support but for more experienced parents to mentor newer parents.
 - Being a new father often requires helping mom to develop a relationship with her newborn. During the first few months of life, the baby will often be the mother’s sole preoccupation. Be sure Dad is included in daily baby activities. The support of fathers helps mothers become more confident and competent in their role as a mother and helps them to be successful in breastfeeding.
 - It’s easy to feel “burned out” and “touched out” by the demands of parenting. The early months of a baby’s life can be very intense and time consuming. Try to be patient and sensitive to each other’s needs.
 - Be creative in finding ways to spend time with your spouse/partner without compromising the needs of your infant. Candle-lit dinners or a picnic in the living room can be fun and help couples reconnect.
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- Have a friend, relative or mother’s helper (a trusted teen-ager) that the baby knows, come over to play and entertain while the parents have some quiet time together somewhere else in the house. Take them with you if you go out.



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- They can help with the baby, but the baby will be comforted by your close proximity.
- Realize that in the early years your child's needs are at their most intense and "this too shall pass."
- Every parent needs a support! Sometimes it can be difficult for parents to find the support they need. Professional counseling can be of great benefit in helping families regain balance and in linking them to resources or other services in the community.