

Kinnections

A newsletter of the Kinship Care Resource Center

Understanding Attachment ...by Dr. Victoria Fitton



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Attachment is a deep and enduring emotional bond that is developed in the first few years of life. It reflects the pleasure, enjoyment, and attraction that a child and caregiver have for each other. Attachment relationships function to promote child, brain, and personality development and emotional regulation. So attachment is critical for healthy child development.

We can break down attachment into components, which can help us strengthen attachment relationships by those components. Attachment components are:

Affective or emotional component. These are those observable affectionate gestures between infants and children and their caregivers like kissing and smiling that demonstrate love. The security of the attachment rela-

tionship also provides the space for a child to display emotional reactions to stress and fear, like crying, clinging, anger, or frustration. A child needs a safe place to express worries and fears. This is how a child learns to express a full range of emotions and also learn emotional regulation. The best way to increase the pleasure and enjoyment of an attached relationship is to increase the affection given to a baby or child, like smiling and kissing.

Behavioral component. Attachment behaviors serve different functions. **Signaling** behaviors (smiling, cooing, reaching) alert the caregiver that the infant desires interaction and closeness or connection. **Aversive** behaviors (crying, kicking) trigger a quick response to provide problem solving or protection

and safety. So, a temper tantrum typically means, "I need help. Won't someone please help me?" The child's coping mechanisms have been outstripped and he or she is dependent on their caregiver for support. **Active** behaviors (reaching for, clinging) promote proximity to the caregiver. **Exploratory** behavior decreases proximity with the caregiver and promotes interaction with the environment and individuation. A good way to respond to a child's behavior is to recognize and understand what the child is communicating by that behavior. Is the child asking for closeness, interaction, help, support, proximity or independence?

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Keeping Children Busy During Summer

If having your child attend a full-time daycare is not an option, there are other ways to keep your child busy during the summer months so that you are able to continue working. OneToughJob.org provides a number of ideas to keep children busy during the summer months that doesn't simply include sitting in front of the television for hours. Finding activities

and events that are occurring in your community is a great place to start when trying to find ways to keep children active during the summer. A lot of these activities are free and open to the public, so if cost is of concern in keeping your child active this summer this is a great place to find ways to keep the children in your care entertained and active during the sum-

mer months. Other ideas include considering a camp, finding out if the school has any activities that your child can participate in, or take a family vacation. For more information about these ideas, visit: <http://www.onetoughjob.org/child-care/after-school/summer-activities>.

Daycare During the Summer Months

If you are in search of some form of daycare for the child in your care this summer, there are a few other options to consider in addition to the traditional full-time daycare. Some of these options include: checking with relatives or neighbors to see if they would be willing to watch the child for a small wage or go to Care.com to find local caregivers in your vicinity. Another

option is to contact local YMCA's, Boys and Girls Club, or churches to find out what they may have available for daycare, etc. No matter who you decide to have look after your children always be sure to check references; do background searches, etc. in order to ensure the safety of your child. When it comes to your child's safety, you

can never be too cautious. For more tips on how to find daycare options, visit: http://www.ehow.com/how_5062332_summer-daycare.html



Finding a Summer Camp

One of the options the article above mentioned is finding a camp for your child to attend. There are always camps occurring

during the summer months—some are day camps while others are overnight camps,

and there are numerous camps that have little or no cost required. Your local YMCA will likely be offering many camps throughout the summer—they may be a great place to start looking for camps that would interest the children in your care. Additionally, the American Camp Association's website has a database of summer camps that you can search

through to find one that may fit your needs. You can search by location, price, activities, dates, as well as other options. To search the American Camp Association's database, follow this link: <http://find.acacamps.org/index.php>



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Cognitive component. Caregiver-child patterns of communication directly influence the development of mental processes in childhood. Attachment plays a vital role in formation of brain structures and organization of the nervous system, language development, attaining full intellectual potential, acquiring a conscience, and increasing competency. To increase this component, try talking to your child more, asking and answering questions, reading books, singing songs, playing games, or building with blocks.

Tactile component. Attachment develops through body/skin contact between the caregiver and infant/child demonstrated in caresses and touches. Gazing, holding, rocking, stroking, and nuzzling are examples of kinesthetic and tactile body contact. Everyone needs more of this almost all of the time. For children that can mean, stroking their head or brushing their hair (gently), holding hands, touching a shoulder, cuddling, sitting close together, swinging at the park, and keeping eye contact while talking.

Psychic component. This means the psychological availability of a caregiver as a source of safety and comfort in times of child distress. A child must be able to count on the caregiver's desire to be available and present, not just physically present but attuned to the child and sensitive to the child's needs. If a caregiver had good and positive attachments in his or her own childhood, then this will come naturally. If not, then the key is to learn (as an adult) to be sensitive and responsive to your own needs as a person. Increase your ability to take care of yourself and that will lead naturally to an ability to meet the needs of your child.

Physical security component. The caregiver must be physically and reliably present. Without adequate environmental reliability the personal growth of a child can't take place. A very particular and substantial someone (caregiver) must exist to whom the child can attach. Children need consistency and structure in their daily lives. We all know this. But a child also needs consistency and structure in

the relationship he or she has with you as the caregiver. Be as available as possible as close to the same times and for the same things as many days as you can. For example, have a meal together on the same day once a week or read bedtime stories together two or three nights a week at the same time and days or sit close together and watch a television show at the same time each week.

Every one of us has attachment relationships. We increase the usefulness of those relationships by taking good care of them. Breaking down the components of attachment into these six categories can be a useful way to think of nurturing all relationships. Demonstrate your enjoyment of special child relationships. Understand the messages behind behavior examples. Talk to the people you love. Touch the people you care about. Be present with the children in your life. And create a secure and predictable environment for children to feel safe and wanted.

“Talk to the people you love. Touch the people you care about. Be present with the children in your life.”

Addressing Family Issues

Family dynamics are incredibly complex on their own—even in the most “traditional” families. When attempting to care for a relative’s child, it can be complicated trying to balance your responsibilities as caregiver while trying to deal with any family issues that may arise. The AARP has acknowledged this complicated relationship and has written an article addressing some of the possible situa-

tions that may come up within kinship families. The article provides advice for various situations that kinship families may encounter, including: what to do when the child’s parent(s) are continuously coming in and out of their child’s life, what help is available for children and families whose parents are incarcerated, and keeping peace with other family members. To read the full

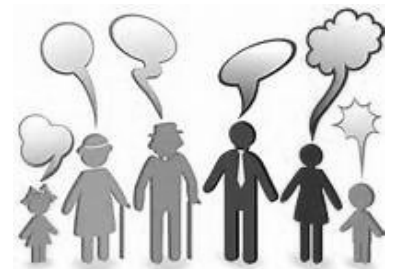
article, please visit: <http://www.aarp.org/relationships/friends-family/info-08-2011/grandfamilies-guide-family-challenges.html?intcmp=outbrain&obref=obinsite>

Time to Talk

Talking to children about drugs and alcohol is a scary thing for a lot of caregivers—but it doesn’t have to be. Through the use of timetotalk.org, The Partnership for a Drug-Free America provides caregivers of all types with helpful information and tips regarding talking to the children in their care about

drugs and alcohol. Visit the website to find more information about how to talk to your children about drugs and alcohol by following this link: <http://www.timetotalk.org/Default.aspx>. If you’re a grandparent who is caring for your grandchild, you’re in luck. The Partnership for a

Drug-Free America and timetotalk.org have provided a free downloadable guide designed specifically for grandparents. Check it out by visiting: http://www.timetotalk.org/downloads/Grandparents_Hold_A_Key_Tool.pdf



New Website

The Kinship Care Resource Center is excited to announce that we have a newly updated website, which includes a calendar showing up-to-date information for support groups across the state as well as links to our publications and past newsletters.

We will continue to make additions to the website includ-

ing helpful factsheets and links to resources that maybe useful when raising a relative’s child.

You can check out our newly updated website at kinship@msu.edu.

Also, don’t forget that we are on Facebook as well under the Michigan Kinship Care Resource

Center and on Twitter @KinshipCareMI.



Learning Activities for Toddlers

Helping in a child's learning is a big commitment; it takes a lot of work, time, energy, and knowledge about what milestones are important for a child to reach. By the time they are school-age, children are expected to know at least the basics—ABCs, 123s, etc. A lot of kinship caregivers are either parenting for the second time after many years of

their grown children being out of the house, or they may be caring for a relative child with no previous experience of being a parent. With either scenario, a quick refresher or re-



minder of what to expect as well as how to assist young

children in the learning process can be extremely helpful. Parents.com recognizes this, and has provided an article that gives tips and ideas for how to assist young children in learning the basics. To learn more about these suggestions or to read the full article, visit: <http://www.parents.com/toddlers-preschoolers/development/intellectual/toddler-learning-activities/>

Keep Kids Moving

A lot of emphasis has been put on keeping kids active and healthy in the recent years. But sometimes it can be easier said than done. Caregivers already have a to-do list a mile long, continuously finding activities for a child to do in attempt to keep them active can be overwhelming. The Washington State Department of

Early Learning provides ideas and suggestions to help caregivers keep children active and healthy. Some of these tips include: making physical play fun for kids, provide a variety of equipment and materials that the children can play with, limit TV and/or video game time, and make use of community re-

sources. To learn more about ways to keep kids active and healthy, visit: <http://www.del.wa.gov/development/health/activity.aspx>

“finding activities for a child to do in attempt to keep them active can be overwhelming”

Getting Kids to Eat Healthy

Trying to get kids to eat healthy foods can be a very challenging task in today's society. With so many fast food restaurants and other unhealthy options so easily accessible, it can be difficult to motivate children to choose healthy items over the other choices. Add to this the fact that buying healthy foods can sometimes be expensive. As kinship caregivers, often times money is al-

ready tight and providing healthy foods for the children you care for while on a budget can be very difficult. With spring and summer-time approaching and an incredible amount of fruits, veggies, and other fresh produce becoming more available, now is a great time to start teaching children the benefits of eating healthy. Pbs.org has some ideas that will help you to encourage children to eat healthy food

while sticking to your budget. For information about tips for encouraging children to eat healthy, please visit: <http://www.pbs.org/parents/food-and-fitness/eat-smart/encourage-kids-to-eat-healthy-food/>. To read more information about tips for eating healthy while on a budget, please visit: <http://www.pbs.org/parents/food-and-fitness/eat-smart/healthy-foods-on-a-budget/>



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We're on the web!

kinship.msu.edu

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The Kinship Care Resource Center is a non-profit statewide organization through the School of Social Work at Michigan State University. The mission of the Kinship Care Resource Center is to support Michigan's kinship families by utilizing research to provide education and outreach to communities and agencies supporting kinship families and offer information and referral, and case management services to relatives raising relative children.

If you would like additional information about the MSU Kinship Care Resource Center, call us toll-free at (800) 535-1218 or e-mail us at kinship@msu.edu

You can also find us on Facebook—Michigan Kinship Care Resource Center at MSU and Twitter @KinshipCareMI!