

# WHAT DOES A GOOD ATTACHMENT LOOK LIKE BETWEEN ADULTS AND KIDS?



A strong and deep relationship between parents and kids is the secure base from which healthy development and growth occurs.



Attachment is a natural force that is based in human instincts and emotions, which moves us to pursue and preserve contact and closeness with others.



Based on the developmental and relational approach of Gordon Neufeld, attachment ideally unfolds in six sequential ways in the first six years of life. It is never too late to build and deepen our relationship with our child.

For a good attachment, adults need to assume responsibility for caring for a child in a consistent, predictable, and generous way. The child must accept the adult's invitation for relationship and be able to feel vulnerable emotions.



## \*NEUFELD'S SIX SEQUENTIAL PHASES OF ATTACHING

### YEAR 0 TO 1 SENSES

Babies are sensory beings who seek contact with others through touch, taste, smell, hearing, and seeing. They like to be close to their caretakers through their SENSES with each child showing preferences this way. From the sound of your voice singing lullabies, to the sight of you, smell of your cooking, or your cuddles, physical contact and closeness builds attachment.

### YEAR 1 TO 2 SAMENESS

A child should ideally start to hold on to their attachments through imitation, copying, and mimicking of their behaviour and actions. They may talk, walk, eat, or adopt mannerisms of the people they desire closeness with. Their identity starts to emerge as a collection of characteristics of the people they are attaching to through SAMENESS.

### YEAR 2 TO 3 BELONGING AND LOYALTY

By the time a child is three they will ideally attach by wanting to BELONG and be LOYAL to the people they are attached to. They will show signs of possessiveness and territoriality over people or things as a means of keeping them close and avoiding separation. They are more likely to want to follow, take the same side, and obey the rules of the people they seek to be close to. They love to hear things like, "there is MY boy" or "there is MY girl."

### YEAR 3 TO 4 SIGNIFICANCE

A child who attaches through SIGNIFICANCE wants to be special and seen as dear in the eyes of their beholders. They long for approval, hunger to be heard, and want to matter to the people they are attached to. For example, when you tell them stories of what they were like when younger or show them baby pictures, they can be reminded of how special they are to you.

### YEAR 4 TO 5 LOVE

If attachment is progressing well, a 5 year old can give their heart to the people and things they are attached to. They can LOVE deeply, showing signs of greater caring, tenderness and compassion. This is the age of "I am going to marry everyone in the family" or hearts, hugs or warmth for everyone and everything they are attached to.

### YEAR 5 TO 6 BEING KNOWN

The deepest way to attach to someone is by sharing one's inner world with them. It is vulnerable to reveal oneself therefore a child will need to feel safe to share their heart's contents. The capacity to hide at this age is tempered by the need to share one's secrets. When a child attaches by wanting to BE KNOWN, the relationship is deep and nourishing and will fuel a child's growth as a separate being.

### HOW CAN WE BUILD STRONG RELATIONSHIPS WITH OUR KIDS?

- Convey genuine delight, enjoyment, and warmth (D.E.W.) in your interactions with them
  - Collect their attention regularly, by paying attention to what they are doing or listening with full attention
  - Use attachment safe and developmentally friendly discipline that preserves your relationship
  - Read their needs and take the lead in providing for them.
  - Don't let things or other people become a source of competition to your relationship, such as screen time
- \*From Neufeld Intensive I: Making Sense of Kids, Neufeld Institute

Attachment doesn't slow down growth - it fuels it.

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