



Part 1

Fostering Communication with your Child

From birth to 24 months



We often associate communication difficulties with teenage years, and to a certain extent, that is true. Parenting teenagers is a challenge – but did you know that fostering good communication skills with your child begins at birth?

Forming a secure attachment with your child is the basis of fostering good communication. This begins early in life and you can start right after the birth.

But first, what is a secure attachment?



A secure attachment means that your child knows that it can rely on you to provide consistent, warm care. Your child begins to understand that you are the preferred caregiver and will miss you when you are not there – but knows with certainty that you will return. This attachment style is important because it will influence your child's behaviours and contribute to how they form other relationships throughout their life and will even influence their choice of life-partner.



From birth to
two months



From birth to approximately two months of age, your baby is communicating in the only way it knows how. Your baby is either attracted to or avoiding stimulation.

Your child has built in signals that they use to communicate to their parents such as grasping, smiling and crying. These signals are ways the baby is using to communicate. It is also their way of trying to form a relationship. It can be hard to know what they want. Is my baby wet, hungry, cold, too hot or tired? It's a bit of a guessing game at first. Whatever the case may be, one thing is helpful, look into your baby's eyes and communicate that you understand that they are uncomfortable.



Soothe your child by speaking calmly and in a low, reassuring tone. Proximity calms your child, so often, just picking them up and cuddling will soothe them. They quickly understand that you are there to see to their needs. The key is to respond promptly and consistently. This is the beginning of a trusting relationship.





From age 2 to 3 months

At the age of 2 or 3 months, your child will begin to read and respond to your facial expressions. They will scan your face and stare into your eyes. Again, a great time to communicate by making meaningful eye contact and transmitting the message that you love them and are trying to understand.

For example, if your baby is crying, picking them up and gazing into their eyes saying “ah, what’s wrong? You’re so upset. It’s ok. I’m here”.

Validating your child’s emotions even at this young age is so important! You child will learn with time that you are trying to understand their emotional states.



From age 3 to 5 months

Too early you think? Not at all.

By 3 – 5 months, your child can make a link between your facial expressions, and your voice. They can also distinguish voices and begin to laugh. As your child continues to grow and develop, they will constantly look at you for reassurance. Your child will figure out that their actions and behaviors affect those around them. This beginning of trust and consistency is vital.



From age 6 to 8 months

It is vital because between the ages of 6 – 8 months, we begin to see the emergence of fear. Your child needs to know that when they experience that emotion, they have someone safe to turn to. That’s you! More than anything, your child needs reassurance as this can be the beginning of separation anxiety.



Separation anxiety means that your child starts to get upset when you are no longer in the room or when you go out. Separation anxiety doesn’t always happen. It really depends on your child’s temperament.



From age 8 to 12 months

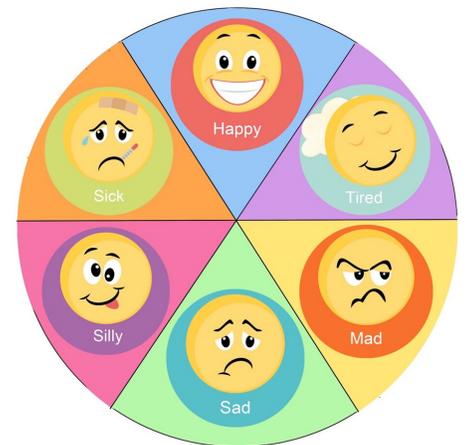
At the age of 8 – 12 months, we can continue to see separation anxiety as the child and parent continue to form a reciprocal relationship. The separation anxiety can go on until the age of approximately 2 years or longer. Usually, separation anxiety involves the distress caused by one parent's absence. With time, over the course of the second year, kids can be comforted equally by either parent. At this age, we also see the emergence of laughter when surprised. Games like Peek-a-Boo are fun and create a bond between you and your child.

From age of 18 to 24 months

From 18 – 24 months, other emotions are developing rapidly as well, but children can lack the ability to identify what they are feeling. That's why it can be especially useful, as your child develops language, to help them name and identify their emotions. A good tool to use here is the Emotion Wheel.

Children at this age also begin to realize that others' emotional reactions can be different than their own.

Caution: it is never a good idea to laugh at your child or ridicule them as their feelings are sensitive and they can be easily hurt. At this age, children develop shame, guilt, embarrassment and pride. Remember, you are helping to build your child's self-esteem, so let's keep it positive.



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