

Parenting Revolution

Baby Edition

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Better Baby Bonding

ACTIVITY SHEET



The bond between parent and baby is one like no other. For some, the bond will be instantaneous from the moment your newborn is placed in your arms. For others, it can take some time for the bond to be established. As you and your baby fall into the rhythm of the ‘fourth trimester’ and get to know one another, that special bond will deepen. Thankfully, studies have shown specific ways to help establish and strengthen your bond and increase the likelihood of a secure attachment over the long-term.



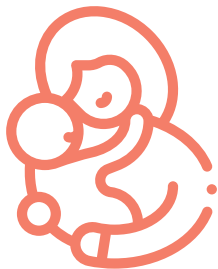
OBJECTIVE SUMMARY

This session is designed to help you:

- (a)** learn the important steps to building a better bond
- (b)** get in tune with the cues and signals your baby communicates
- (c)** develop strategies to help you to cope when your baby won't stop crying

Bonding Versus Attachment

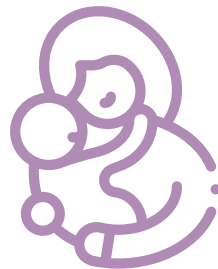
BONDING



Bonding takes place when a parent feels emotionally connected to their newborn baby – often with a sense of unconditional love, self-sacrifice, protection and care. Bonding, however, is a process that requires time. It often comes about naturally from daily interactions and caregiving. Bonding may be delayed as a result of difficult labour or medical complications. Bonding may also be slowed as a result of exhaustion from sleepless nights, hormonal imbalance or mental health concerns.

PARENT – CHILD

ATTACHMENT

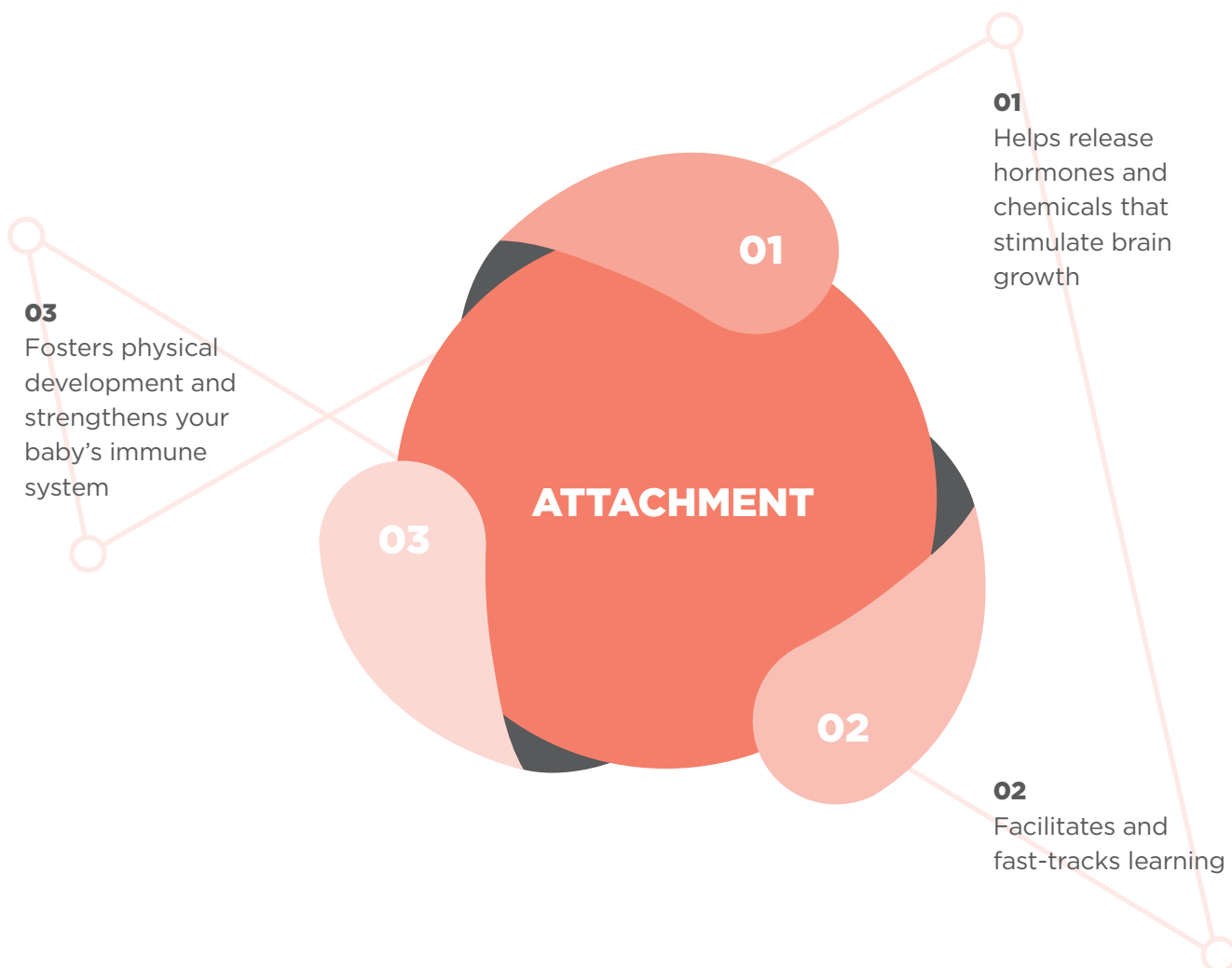


Attachment is the deep emotional connection a child has with their caregiver. This occurs when a child seeks the comfort, protection and support from their caregiver, and longs to be close to them. Like parent-infant bonding, child-caregiver attachment is a process that can take time. Studies show a secure attachment is primarily reliant on nonverbal interactions. Yet attachment may be inhibited when emotional exchanges are limited, and caregivers are unresponsive to needs.

CHILD – PARENT

Why is Attachment Important?

During the initial phase of life, babies do not have the capacity to regulate their emotions; they rely on a loving adult to soothe their feelings, which in turn, helps them feel safe and secure. Attachment research shows babies who have consistent and nurturing relationships early in life go on to develop secure relational bonds throughout their life. In addition to promoting emotional health, quality relationships, and physical health in later years, a secure attachment will immediately predict three key benefits.



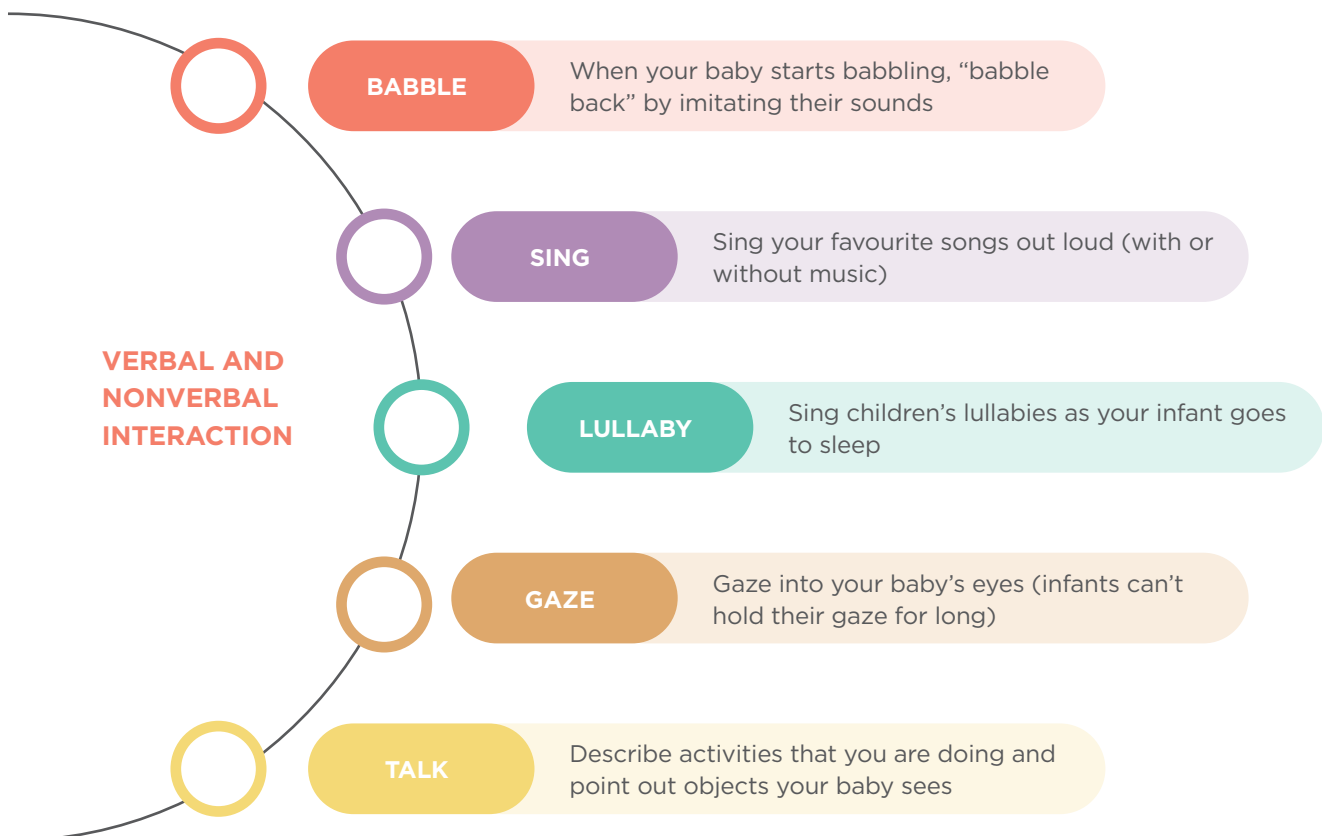
BY CONTRAST, INFANTS WHO EXPERIENCE DETACHMENT, PARENTAL INCONSISTENCY AND NEGLECT, BECOME VULNERABLE TO LONG-TERM MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS.

Gaining Traction Through Interaction

Interacting and communicating with your child both verbally and nonverbally are essential for your baby's cognitive development. As well as helping to build your bond, it can help your baby's language development, emotion regulation, and can help to signal a new activity. Eye contact is also an important part of bonding and language development for your baby. Eye gazing is one of the first cognitive milestones a baby will make (around 6-10 weeks), and it helps to foster a baby's intellectual, emotional, and social development.



Which of the following ways of interacting with your infant would you be comfortable with?



You've Got 'The Touch'

Tactile stimulation (physical touch) is an important part of bonding with your baby. Skin-to-skin contact not only helps your baby to stay calm and sleep better, but it also reduces your own stress levels. Physical affection can also help to promote successful breastfeeding, regulate your baby's temperature and trigger the release of oxytocin ('cuddle hormone'). The more tactile stimulation your baby receives from you during the first 3 years of life, the better they will be at regulating stress and emotions later in life.



Generate a list of ways you could engage physical touch with your newborn:

Lots of kisses and cuddles

Give your baby a gentle massage

Have a relaxing bath with your baby

Stroke baby's head/face and body while talking to them

TOUCH

How Much is Too Much?

STUDIES HAVE UNEQUIVOCALLY SHOWN THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS 'SPOILING' YOUR INFANT - YOU CAN'T HOLD THEM, CUDDLE THEM, OR GIVE THEM TOO MUCH LOVE AND ATTENTION. TO A NEWBORN, THE WORLD IS A NEW, LOUD AND UNFAMILIAR PLACE. THEREFORE, THE PLACE THEY FEEL SAFEST IS IN YOUR ARMS. BABIES NEED A LOT OF ATTENTION, AND CRYING IS THEIR WAY OF CALLING FOR IT (OR COMMUNICATING A NEED). BY RESPONDING TO YOUR BABY'S CRIES, YOUR BABY LEARNS TO TRUST THAT YOU WILL FULFILL THEIR NEEDS, WHICH OVER TIME, HELPS THEM BECOME MORE SECURE AND CONFIDENT.

Q: What are some things you could do as a couple to bond with your baby?

Decipher Decode Deliver

Rather than sticking to a timetable, during the initial phase of life, 'on demand' parenting is a great way to approach caring for your infant. Your role is to respond to your baby's cues every time. Not only does this help your baby maintain a sense of calm, but it also teaches your baby that you're dependable (they can completely rely on you to meet their physical and emotional needs). However, 'on demand' parenting can also be exhausting. Crying is one of the only ways your baby can communicate. Yet, not all baby cries are the same, they differ with what they need. If you learn to decipher and decode your baby's cry, you'll be better positioned to efficiently deliver what your baby needs.

On average, newborns will cry and fuss for around 2-3 hours each day (for some it will be more - especially if you have a baby with colic or settling issues). You may have just fed them, burped them and changed their nappy or daiper and they're still crying. Why?

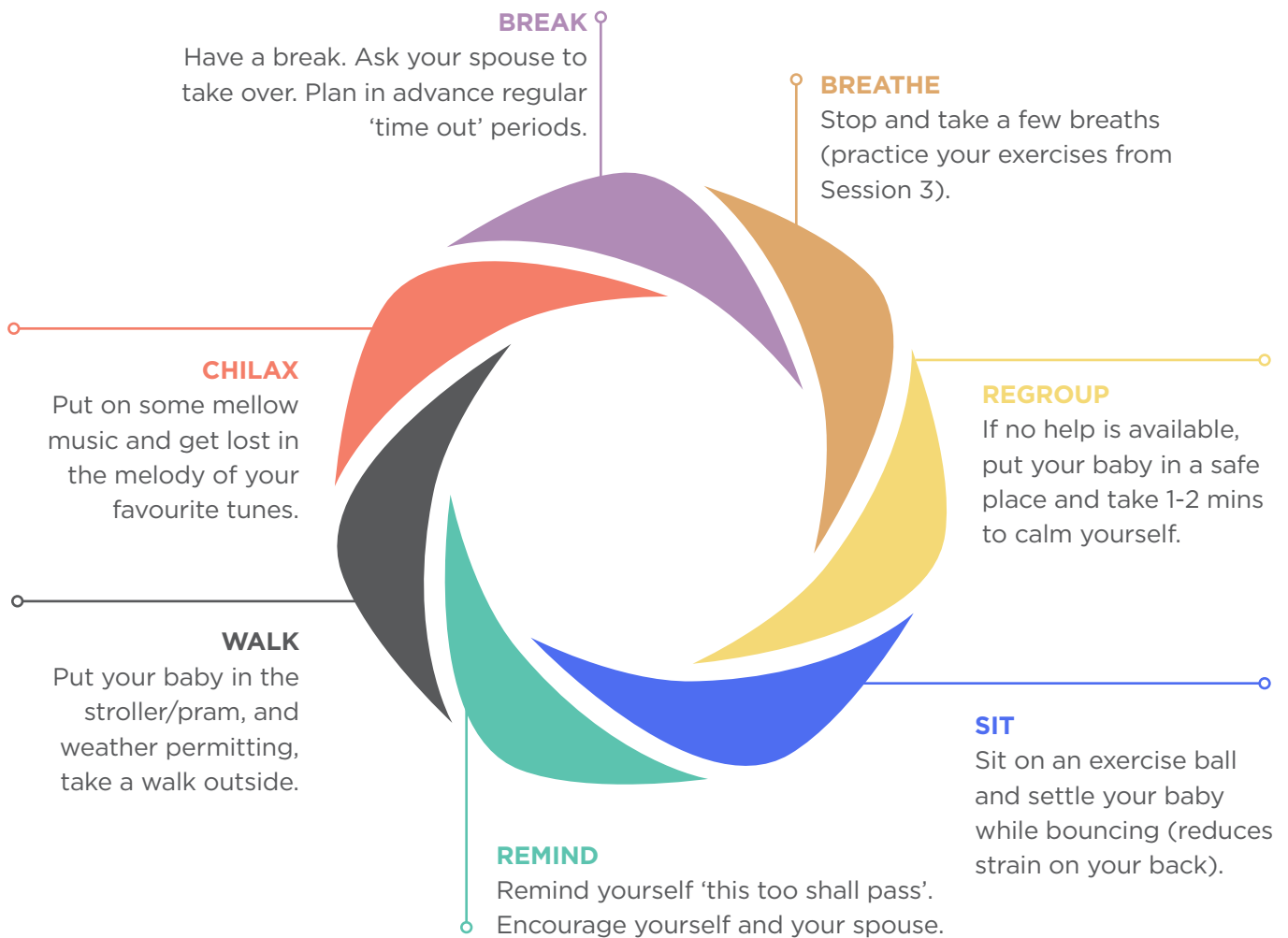
Use the checklist below to help you decipher and decode possible reasons for their cry. Find the appropriate 'on demand' response to deliver.



Calming Strategies

Staying calm whilst your baby relentlessly cries is easier said than done. When your baby is crying, it activates your stress hormone response (your body releases adrenaline and cortisol). This leads to feelings of urgency and panic. As such, you may find it difficult to think clearly and regulate your own emotions. Not only is this unpleasant for you, but your baby will pick up on your stress, reducing their likelihood of calming down. If your baby won't calm, reorient your attention, and work on calming yourself.

When the baby won't stop crying, it's important to have calming strategies of your own:



WHEN YOUR NEWBORN HAS MULTIPLE OR CONFLICTING NEEDS AND WON'T BE CONSOLED, YOUR GOAL IS NOT NECESSARILY TO STOP THEIR CRYING. RATHER, YOUR GOAL IS TO REMAIN CALM, MAINTAIN A HEALTHY BOND AND COMMUNICATE TO YOUR BABY THAT YOU'RE THERE FOR THEM, THAT SIMPLY... YOU CARE!

Q: What are some warning signs indicating you may be stressed or overwhelmed?

HINT: Body discomfort, thoughts, emotions, behaviours

Q: List some stress-reducing strategies that have helped you in the past:

Q: As a couple, how can you support one another if starting to feel overwhelmed?

