Attachment Parenting
INTERNATIONAL®

The Eight Principles of Attachment Parenting
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The Eight Principles of Attachment Parenting

The mission of Attachment Parenting International (API) is to promote parenting practices that create strong, healthy emotional bonds between children and their parents. API believes that Attachment Parenting (AP) practices fulfill a child’s need for trust, empathy, and affection and will provide a foundation for a lifetime of healthy relationships.

Rooted in attachment theory, Attachment Parenting has been studied extensively for over 60 years by psychology and child development researchers, and more recently, by researchers studying the brain. These studies revealed that infants are born “hardwired” with strong needs to be nurtured and to remain physically close to the primary caregiver, usually the mother, during the first few years of life. The child’s emotional, physical, and neurological development is greatly enhanced when these basic needs are met consistently and appropriately. These needs can be summarized as proximity, protection, and predictability.

The baby’s crying, clinging, and sucking are early techniques to keep her mother nearby. As the child grows and feels more secure in her relationship with her mother, she is better able to explore the world around her and to develop strong, healthy bonds with other important people in her life.

To help guide parents along their journey, API created The Eight Principles of Attachment Parenting. These guidelines are founded on sound research and are known to be effective in helping children develop secure attachments.

API acknowledges that every family has unique circumstances with distinct needs and resources. The Eight Principles are intended to help parents better understand normal child development, to help parents identify their children’s needs, and to aid parents in responding to their children with respect and empathy. By educating themselves about children’s health and development, parents will become more conscious of and attuned to their children’s needs when making decisions.

Developed to promote optimal attachment, these principles are developmentally appropriate and comprehensive enough to apply to a broad spectrum of family situations. These principles may be applied through the practices outlined in this document. The Eight Principles of Attachment Parenting addresses attachment-promoting behaviors that can be started during pregnancy and extend through a child’s seventh or eighth year. In 2008, API will publish a companion document addressing the preservation of attachments with older children.

Although the terms “mother,” “father,” and “caregiver” are used throughout The Eight Principles, API embraces the diversity of family structures and values all people in a child’s life who actively foster a strong attachment relationship with the children in their care.

Attachment Parenting is not a one-size-fits-all recipe for raising children, therefore API recommends parents use their own judgment and intuition to create a parenting style that fosters attachment and works for their family. Some practices listed in The Eight Principles are inherently more attachment-promoting than others. The most ideal practices are listed first. Many API support groups start each meeting by saying “Take what works for your family and leave the rest.” This sentiment also applies to The Eight Principles of Attachment Parenting.

Those who need more information or help in applying the principles or practices of The Eight Principles to a specific family circumstance may visit the API Web site at http://www.attachmentparenting.org to find an API parent support group or API leader, or to research options through materials on the API Approved Resources list.

1. Prepare for Pregnancy, Birth, and Parenting

The remarkable journey of new life is a positive, transformative experience. Pregnancy offers expectant parents an opportunity to prepare physically, mentally, and emotionally for parenthood. Making informed decisions about childbirth, newborn care, and parenting practices is a critical investment in the attachment relationship between parent and child. Education is a key component of preparation for the difficult decisions required of parents and is an ongoing process as each stage of growth and development brings new joys and challenges.
When preparing for the birth of a child, it is easy to get caught up in the material things associated with pregnancy, childbirth, and newborn care. Tiny infant clothing, the latest maternity fashions, and baby gear can all be part of preparing for a baby, but the lasting investment of preparation involves creating a peaceful, loving environment in which to grow, birth, and care for a new life.

**Preparing for Pregnancy & Birth**

A new pregnancy can evoke strong emotions in the parents-to-be regardless of whether the pregnancy was long-anticipated or a bit of a surprise. The knowledge that they are bringing a baby into the world can bring excitement and joy to expectant parents, but it may also yield less positive emotions. Memories may be dredged up from the expectant parents’ own childhoods, from a prior complicated pregnancy or birth, or from a previous loss. Time taken to reflect on individual childhood experiences and current beliefs about parenting is invaluable preparation. Expectant parents should explore different parenting philosophies and discuss parenting approaches that best nurture healthy attachments within their growing family.

It is important for expectant parents to work through negative emotions surrounding the pregnancy so they can focus on the joy of welcoming the baby. Those experiencing negative emotions regarding the pregnancy should seek help from a health care provider. Meditation, yoga, visualization, and other relaxation techniques can help minimize stress surrounding the pregnancy while helping pregnant mothers prepare for the physical rigor of birth.

In addition to preparing emotionally for pregnancy, expectant mothers must prepare physically. This preparation includes eating nutritious foods, exercising regularly, and avoiding stress when possible. Many women work throughout their pregnancies; frequent breaks, adequate healthy snacks, and a safe work environment are essential and should be discussed with employers during pregnancy. Pregnant women should explore different types of health-care providers and birthing options, and examine the benefits and risks for family-practice doctors, obstetricians, and midwives. Interview multiple practitioners and do not be afraid to inquire about important issues like routine use of interventions, breastfeeding support, and the level of parental involvement in decision-making during birth.

Pregnancy also provides the perfect opportunity to recommit to a strong, healthy relationship between expectant parents. Research shows that mothers involved in a loving and supportive relationship are more likely to have positive feelings about their pregnancy and to bond more easily with their infants. Likewise, parents who educate themselves about pregnancy and childbirth options are more likely to be involved in decisions about their birth and are better able to avoid unnecessary interventions that can lead to dangerous complications. Taking time to discuss childrearing views, childhood experiences, and feelings of joy or anxiety can also help strengthen the parents’ relationship.

When looking for a health-care provider and making an informed decision about where to have a baby, consider reviewing “Ten Steps of the Mother-Friendly Childbirth Initiative for Mother-Friendly Hospitals, Birth Centers, and Home Birth Services” published by the Coalition for Improving Maternity Services (CIMS) at http://www.motherfriendly.org/MFCI/steps.html. If there are no “Mother-Friendly” hospitals, birth centers, or home-birth services close by, investigate whether there are “Baby-Friendly” hospitals or birth centers by visiting the Baby Friendly Initiative site at www.babyfriendly.org. This initiative, developed by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), is now being adopted by health-care systems all over the world. “Baby Friendly” hospitals and birth centers have implemented the “Ten Steps” set up by UNICEF to insure that all staff and administrators have made a commitment to educate, support, and encourage mothers to breastfeed their babies, if at all possible. Parents are assured, among other things, that information they receive from all medical staff will be consistent, and that the mother will be allowed to room in with her baby.

Many childbirth preparation and parenting classes are available to parents from independent educators or local hospitals. Good childbirth classes, those that are interactive and provide physical and emotional preparation for birth, are helpful in preparing for each unique birth. These classes should also address interventions that may come up during labor and birth, or during the early postpartum period. Generally, the fewer interventions (such as electronic fetal monitoring, ultrasound, pitocin, epidural, episiotomy, and forceps or vacuum extraction) used during birth, the better the outcome for everyone involved. In addition to attending classes, many expectant parents benefit from
reading books and articles, visiting parent support groups, and asking lots of questions. API support groups are an excellent resource for researching options in individual communities.

Many women decide whether or not to breastfeed their babies as early as the first trimester of pregnancy. Breastfeeding education is critical to future nursing success. More information about the benefits of breastfeeding and breastfeeding support, are available in the Principle Feed with Love and Respect found on page six of this document.

During childbirth, a mother should remain alert and physically active. The use of movement and different body positions during labor can greatly reduce discomfort and avoid unnecessary interventions, while also helping a baby move into the ideal position for birth. A birth doula, or labor assistant, can provide excellent physical and emotional support before and during labor, and after childbirth. Having a support person on hand who is experienced in childbirth can reduce the total duration of labor and the incidence of interventions, as well as decrease the need for pain medications, and improve a mother’s feeling about her child’s birth. More about doulas, and information on finding one in your area, is available by visiting Doulas of North America on the Web (www.DONA.org).

Expectant parents should research all aspects of “routine” newborn care recommended by their health care provider and birth facility, document their preferences, and share them with their health-care providers before the birth. These preferences may include the timing of umbilical-cord cutting, the opportunity to breastfeed as soon as possible after birth, the choice to have baby “room in” with mother, the decision to circumcise or not, the use of specific immunizations, the administration of eye drops, and the use of pacifiers, bottles, and formula. Prepared parents are better able to advocate for care that is in the best interest of their baby.

During the first few weeks after birth, many parents find it’s easier to focus on connecting with their baby if they have extra support. Parents can prepare in advance by asking family members for help, recruiting volunteers, or hiring a professional to ensure that the new family’s needs for nutritious food and sufficient rest are met. Parents are encouraged to ask for help with meal preparation, care of older siblings, and household chores. Hiring a postpartum doula is a wonderful option.

Like a birth doula, postpartum doulas are trained to offer knowledge and support in a variety of areas, including infant feeding, emotional and physical recovery from childbirth, infant soothing, and coping skills for new parents. Some postpartum doulas also help with light housework, prepare meals, and help incorporate older children into this new experience.

Regardless of how prepared parents are, unexpected surprises can force families to deviate from their birth- and newborn-care plans, causing them to make critical decisions very quickly. When this occurs, parents should assess the risks and benefits of all available options.

Decision-making is the parents’ responsibility. Considering the following list of questions may help:

- What are the benefits of this intervention, and what are your instincts telling you?
- What are the risks and possible outcomes if you choose to do this or if you choose not to?
- What are the other options?
- How long do you have to make the decision?

Preparation for Becoming a Parent

Preparation for becoming a parent doesn’t end with childbirth; successful parents find it essential to continuously educate themselves about their child’s ever-changing developmental stages. Reading books about childhood development allows parents to have realistic expectations for themselves and for their children, allowing parents to be better prepared for the joys and challenges of each stage. Advanced preparation and education prompts discussion about parental concerns before they become crises.

For example, understanding a two-year-old’s cognitive development might help parents understand why their young child does not share her toys with a new sibling or playmate. Rather than forcing the child to share and creating a power struggle, parents familiar with child development realize that the child is not yet developmentally ready or able to share and would choose an age-appropriate tactic such as distraction when their daughter began to
squabble with another child over toys. Refer to API’s Bibliography available on the Web at http://www.attachmentparenting.org/booksarticles.shtml for additional resources on understanding developmental and cognitive development.

Discussing safety before baby takes his first toddling steps, or considering how to approach alternate caregivers before the first date night, allows parents to be consistent with their children and can help avoid disputes in the heat of the moment. This preparation may include reading books, talking to other parents, and gathering information from health practitioners or the Internet. Remember, however, that just because something has been discussed in advance doesn’t mean that the child won’t bring an unexpected twist to a situation. As always, flexibility is critical!

Advanced preparation is especially important in choosing an educational environment for young children. Because there are so many options in today’s world, parents must carefully consider which type of education best fits their child’s unique needs.

2. Feed with Love and Respect

Feeding a child involves more than providing nutrients; it is an act of love. Whether providing for the very intense hunger needs of a newborn to meals served at the family dinner table, parents can use feeding time as an opportunity to strengthen their bonds with their children.

The newborn’s rooting, sucking, and crying reflexes evolved to ensure the close proximity of a mother or other dependable caregiver to meet her intense needs. The more parents learn to identify and meet their baby’s needs, the more secure the parent-child bond becomes. Although older children are better able to feed themselves and to communicate their needs, parents should continue to respect their child’s hunger cues, offer healthy foods, model healthy eating habits, and make mealtimes a time for love and connection.

Breastfeeding and Attachment

Breastfeeding satisfies an infant’s nutritional and emotional needs better than any other method of infant feeding. The World Health Organization (WHO) ranked methods of infant feeding in order of preference based on best health benefits to the baby: the best choice is nursing, followed by pumped breastmilk in a bottle or supplemental feeding system, breastmilk from another lactating mother, and if none of these methods is available, artificial milk. It is critical that parents and other caregivers understand the importance of breastfeeding and of supporting the breastfeeding mother. Studies show that mothers have greater breastfeeding success when partners are knowledgeable and supportive of breastfeeding. It is important that both parents commit not only to breastfeeding, but feeding when their baby indicates he is hungry (feeding on cue) instead of feeding on a set schedule.

Feeding on cue creates a close nursing relationship, ensures that the mother produces enough milk, and provides the baby with the nutrition and loving touch that is naturally designed for optimal brain development and growth. A baby’s cues may include squirming, making fussing sounds, putting his hand in his mouth, rooting, and turning his head toward his mother’s breast. The mother is the baby’s environment. When the mother is holding her baby, she develops a unique ability to read her child’s nonverbal cues, which enables her to respond empathically to his needs even before he gets to the crying stage. During times of sickness, breastmilk provides the necessary nutrition and antibodies to fight germs, helping to shorten the duration of an illness or to avoid the illness completely.

The American Academy of Pediatrics Breastfeeding Policy Statement (February 2005) states, “It is recommended that breastfeeding continue for at least 12 months, and thereafter for as long as mutually desired.” They also state that “There is no upper limit to the duration of breastfeeding and no evidence of psychologic or developmental harm from breastfeeding into the third year of life or longer.” The World Health Organization goes on to add that even though in western cultures it may be unusual to see a child nurse past one year, worldwide it is normal for children, and it continues to be important nutritionally, immunologically, and emotionally beyond one year.

Breastfeeding is also important for the mother’s health and well-being. Breastfeeding triggers the release of the attachment-promoting hormone oxytocin into the mother’s body. Often called “the mothering hormone,” oxytocin has a calming effect on both mother and baby. Breastfeeding can also reduce the risk of many devastating diseases.
such as depression (including postpartum depression), breast cancer, and other cancers. Breastfeeding preserves a valuable resource, money. In one year, families choosing breastfeeding over formula can save enough money to buy a major appliance.

As mother and baby become more adept, they will find that nursing becomes easier and will appreciate its convenience; it’s available any time, anywhere, and satisfies many more needs than infant hunger. Nursing is a valuable mothering tool as it is naturally comforting to the baby. Nursing when a child is hurt or upset can help calm the child and meet his needs quickly. “Comfort nursing” meets the baby’s sucking needs and is one of the many wonderful benefits of breastfeeding. This aspect of nursing continues throughout the breastfeeding relationship.

Breastfeeding can usually continue during a healthy pregnancy. Nursing an older child and a baby is known as “tandem nursing.” If the older baby/child has weaned by the time a new baby is born, it is not unusual for him to want to nurse again when he sees a new sibling at the breast. Parents may refer to La Leche League International publications *The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding* (2004) and *Adventures in Tandem Nursing: Breastfeeding During Pregnancy and Beyond* (2003) for a thorough discussion of the issues surrounding the decision to nurse through a pregnancy and beyond.

La Leche League International provides a network of mother-to-mother support for breastfeeding mothers. For more detailed information about any aspect of breastfeeding, including benefits of breastfeeding, basic breastfeeding information, tandem nursing, and weaning, parents can contact La Leche League International or visit their Web site at www.lalecheleague.org. If more serious complications arise with breastfeeding, mothers should seek help from an International Board-Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC).

**Bottle Nursing**

Parents who bottlefeed should familiarize themselves with breastfeeding behaviors to gain a thorough understanding of this model for infant caregiving. API recommends that these parents adapt this model while feeding and nurturing their children. API refers to this style of feeding as “bottle nursing” because it reflects breastfeeding behaviors. In the early days, weeks, and months, feeding is one of the primary ways in which a mother can initiate a secure attachment relationship with her baby. API’s recommendation is applicable to infants who are bottlefed breastmilk, formula, or a combination.

To simulate breastfeeding, it is recommended that parents hold the baby when bottlefeeding, positioning the bottle alongside the breast. This position helps the baby’s face and cheek come in contact with the parent’s arm, and that skin-to-skin contact helps parent and baby feel more connected. Using this position also helps to prevent the baby from developing “flat-head syndrome,” or plagiocephaly. When a baby drinks from a propped bottle, both mother and baby miss an important opportunity to strengthen their emotional connection. Propping the bottle can also be a choking hazard.

Feeding time is a wonderful opportunity to bond with a baby, so it’s important that he feed in the arms of a loved one. Try to keep feeding time a special time of calm for both parent and child. Maintain eye contact while feeding during those times when the baby is alert and interested, switch positions from one side to another; this helps strengthen the baby’s eye muscles, talk softly and lovingly to baby at feeding times. As with breastfeeding, bottle-nursing families should respect their child’s hunger cues by avoiding feeding schedules. Following the child’s cues helps to strengthen the attachment relationship and shows the baby that her needs are understood.

Some mothers who bottle nurse choose to follow the breastfeeding model closely so the baby associates feeding with being held by his mother, therefore the mother is the primary person who feeds him while using the bottle. This approach to bottle feeding produces many benefits for mother and child. The mother will have an opportunity to sit down, to have a special time to bond and rest, just as a breastfeeding mother would be “forced” to do. A new mother sometimes needs this ‘excuse’ to rest, instead of feeling that she must do all the housework or other tasks while letting someone else feed the baby. With this behavior, the baby benefits from the consistency of his mother’s presence while feeding and allows him to gaze at her face, smell her scent, and feel secure in her arms. This enables their precious attachment relationship to develop.
Suckling can remain a strong need well past the first year or two. Pacifiers, when used appropriately, can satisfy that need until the child outgrows it. Breastfeeding babies suck at the breast for comfort, so parents of bottlefed babies can enrich their child’s experience by either holding the baby in the feeding position when giving a pacifier or simply holding an older child. These modifications increase close physical contact and bonding time, and can make weaning from the pacifier a more natural and gradual process.

As the baby gets older and is able to hold his own bottle, the parent may be tempted to allow the baby to feed himself or to let him walk around with a bottle rather than providing the comfort the child is seeking. If a child doesn’t associate the bottle with being held or having undivided attention by the parent, he might use the bottle or a pacifier as a comfort tool, or “transitional object.” Toddlers who use the bottle, pacifier, or thumb for comfort—rather than being comforted by the parent—may have a much harder time in giving up the bottle, pacifier or thumb down the road. This is not to be confused with those times when it’s appropriate for a child to drink from a cup, such as when he is thirsty, during mealtimes, or other times the child is meeting a need other than comfort.

If they learn to come to their parent for comfort or cuddle time and perhaps a few sucks on their bottle or pacifier, eventually they will prefer the cuddle and gradually wean from the transitional object, much like a breastfeeding toddler.

**Nurturing Through Feeding**

Parents can nurture themselves when feeding the new baby by sitting in a comfortable chair, having something to drink (like water or herbal tea), and taking this special time to get to know the baby. The distance from a baby’s eyes to his mother’s eyes while nursing is about eleven inches, the perfect focal length for newborn vision. Nature provides this perfect visual field for baby to study its parents’ faces, allowing baby to fall in love with his parents through sight, taste, touch, smell, and sound.

Just as baby flourishes when breastfed by her mother, the new mother flourishes when nurtured by her partner. Sometimes mothers become so involved in the care of their infants that they don’t recognize their own needs until they are in emotional or physical trouble. Mothers need frequent rest, plentiful fluids, and adequate nutrition. Feeding time is the ideal time to take a break, rest, and refuel.

A father’s relationship with the baby is unique and extremely important in the child’s overall development. It is important that fathers know they can develop a relationship with their baby in many ways other than feeding, such as holding the baby after he has eaten, bathing the baby, changing a diaper, practicing infant massage, taking walks and naps together, and playfully interacting with the baby. Also, when the father nurtures the mother, he nurtures his baby as well.

**Introducing Solids**

What does starting solids have to do with Attachment Parenting? A parent’s sensitivity and attunement to her baby will be important in determining whether her child is ready for solids. As with all decisions, a parent must examine available options and make the best choice for her child—in this case, she must opt for the foods conducive to optimal brain and physical development. Babies who are fed the healthiest diet are sick less often, have fewer discipline problems, and achieve better in school. Babies start to show interest in solid foods toward the second half of the first year. Signs for readiness include getting a few teeth, drooling, interest in what the parents are eating, feeding more frequently, sitting up unassisted, and the ability to pick up small pieces of food by herself. Until these external signs are in place, it is unlikely that the baby is fully ready. It is important to remember that the child will let her parents know when she is ready. For instance, some babies who are prone to allergies may naturally reject solid foods until they are older.

Many experts agree that a baby is ready for solids when he no longer thrusts out his tongue, and he is able to pick up small items with his thumb and forefinger. When a baby is just learning to eat solids, offer breast or bottle first, followed by one solid food. Start slowly with foods that are not likely to cause allergies (delay dairy, eggs, fish, soy, peanuts, and any foods that other family members are allergic to). Introduce gluten-containing foods (wheat, oats, barley, rye) with caution. Gradually introducing gluten while breastfeeding has been shown to reduce the risk of
celiac disease. Watch for signs that new foods agree with the baby and that he shows a genuine interest. Introduce new foods one at a time for at least five days before introducing another food. This allows parents to watch for a reaction.

While the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends introducing solids at six months of age, breastmilk and/or artificial milk will likely be a baby’s primary nutrition source until about one year of age. It is normal for your child to eat small quantities of solid foods during this time. Regardless of the amount consumed, mealtimes are an important opportunity for the child to explore new tastes and textures, to develop feeding skills, and to learn the social behaviors of the family’s mealtime routines. More information about introducing solids is available through the materials listed on the API Bibliography at http://www.attachmentparenting.org/booksarticles.shtml.

**Watch Out for Allergies**

Wheat, eggs, and dairy have been identified as the three most common allergens, however acidic fruits or vegetables may also cause your child discomfort. Don’t be alarmed if your child shows no interest in food before one year of age. Some children need more time for their immune systems to develop before they are able to digest solid foods. Some of the signs of a food allergy include: runny nose, itchy nose or eyes, a rash, irritability, sleeplessness, diarrhea, or refusal to eat a certain food. Let your child be your guide and allow your child to develop his taste for food naturally.

**Nurturing a Taste for Nutritious Food**

Breastmilk prepares infants for the varying tastes of solid foods because it is flavored by the foods eaten by the nursing mother. Generally, children develop their eating patterns from their parents, therefore it’s never too early for parents to begin improving their habits. When parents offer nutritious foods early, children will develop a natural taste for these foods.

What is considered “nutritious” food? Generally a good rule of thumb for identifying nutritious foods is those foods that are in the most natural state (least processed) possible, and that were grown or raised as naturally as reasonable (avoiding pesticides and growth hormones). Children who tolerate dairy products usually love cheeses and yogurt. Consider cheeses that are less processed, such as Swiss. Plain yogurt sweetened with a little maple syrup and fresh fruit makes a healthy snack.

Foods containing dyes, preservatives, and excess salt, and sugar should be avoided. Many parents find that they don’t have to rely on baby food that comes prepackaged. By six months of age or older, babies are often interested in eating what their parents eat. Cooking foods without salt, sugar, or spices can provide meals for the family and for the baby. Adults can season their food after cooking. Mashing or blending some foods prepared for an adult meal may make them palatable for a baby. They can be frozen in small portions in an ice tray.

A growing child still requires nutritious snacks (such as prepared finger foods) and meals throughout the day. Snacks or drinks that contain sugar will curb the child’s appetite and negatively impact their willingness to eat more nutritious foods.

Make mealtimes with your baby and child an important family gathering time. Try to make at least one meal a day (dinner time for most families) a time for connection and community. Toddlers need to eat multiple small meals during the day and should not be expected to sit at a dinner table for long periods of time.

Remember that it is the parent’s job is to provide healthy choices. The child should be allowed to choose what and how much to eat and should be encouraged to follow his bodily cues of hunger and thirst to eat when he is hungry and stop when he is full. Forcing a child to eat when he is not hungry, or to eat foods he does not want to eat, can lead to unhealthy eating habits and potentially to eating disorders. Never use food as a reward or punishment, or make food (or dessert) contingent on behavior. Rather than restricting access to foods, consider having only healthy foods available in the home. Studies have shown that when offered a variety of healthy food choices, children will, over time, select a balanced diet (even if they only eat peas for one week and chicken for the next).

Parents who have concerns about their child’s eating habits, diet, allergies, or general health should refer to the API bibliography for recommended reading, contact local API Leaders, or call a local health-care provider.
Education about food choices is key to making informed decisions.

**Gentle Weaning**

Nursing a child more than one or two years is normal human behavior and continues to offer many advantages. Although weaning begins the moment solid foods are introduced into an infant’s diet, breastmilk remains a beneficial component of the child’s nutrition and overall good health. It is also an effective comfort tool, providing both mother and child a special, relaxing time together to reconnect.

Food increasingly takes the place of breastmilk in terms of caloric need, but nursing continues to meet many other needs such as comfort and nurturing. La Leche League International and API recommend that weaning occur only when a child outgrows the need. If weaning is initiated by the mother, it should be done gradually and sensitively.

If there comes a point where the mother needs to wean before the child has displayed a readiness to wean, gentle techniques such as distraction, substitution, extension of time between sessions, night weaning, response by the father to baby’s nighttime needs, or shortened nursing sessions may help. Discussions with a local API support group or La Leche League group may offer more ideas or suggestions for weaning. Fathers and other caregivers can also help the mother at this time by becoming more involved in the care of, and activities with, their older child. If the child reacts strongly to this change, parents should assess the situation and the child’s unmet needs and reevaluate the child’s is true readiness.

An empathic mother understands that abrupt weaning from breast or bottle can affect the attachment relationship with her child, so it is important for parents to develop strategies for replacing the nursing frequency with extra attention. This may include more time to cuddle and read stories, drinking from a cup when thirsty, and playing together.

Children under one year of age will need to be weaned from breast to bottle and bottlefed children should be weaned as gently from their bottles as breastfed babies are from the breast.

Parents should remember that the weaning process takes time and patience; every child is different so there is no set timetable. Parents can learn more about these techniques in API’s supplement on weaning.

**3. Respond with Sensitivity**

Parents can build the foundation of trust and empathy by understanding and responding appropriately to their infant’s needs. Babies communicate their needs in many ways including body movements, facial expressions, and crying. They learn to trust when their needs are consistently responded to with sensitivity. Building a strong attachment with a baby involves not only responding consistently to his physical needs, but also spending enjoyable time interacting with him and thus meeting his emotional needs.

There are many societal challenges that can interfere with parents’ ability to develop a responsive relationship with their babies. For example, parents may believe myths about spoiling a baby or they may follow unsolicited advice from well-meaning family, friends, and the media. Advice that conflicts with science, facts about normal development, or a parent’s own intuitive feelings can create stress for the parent who must decide how to respond.

In the course of normal child development, babies form attachments with the person or people who spend the majority of time nurturing and caring for them. Frequent holding and interactions with baby increase bonding and promote secure attachment. In the first six months or so, a baby may seem happy being held by or interacting with other people. Then at eight to nine months of age, many babies suddenly begin to respond with fear and anxiety to separation from their mother. This, too, is a normal phase.

Babies and children require empathy and respect for their feelings to help them learn to feel safe and secure. Intense fears of separation will naturally subside as a child matures. It may take considerably longer for more sensitive children to be comfortable in the care of non-parental adults. Follow the child’s cues and do not force children to accept strangers or expect them to overcome stranger/separation anxiety before they’re ready.
Needs and the Benefits of Responding with Sensitivity

Babies’ brains are immature and significantly underdeveloped at birth, therefore they cannot be expected to soothe themselves. When faced with challenging situations, calm, loving, empathetic parents use descriptive language, name emotions, and use loving physical touch help their children learn to regulate their emotions and intense feelings. This requires a depth of personal reserve, patience, and awareness that does not typically come easily or naturally and requires practice and reflection. By responding in these ways, parents serve as a safe and loving ‘container’ for these emotions that the child is incapable of avoiding, managing, and/or resolving.

This process helps babies and children learn to constructively self-regulate emotional triggers. The many daily opportunities parents have to calm and soothe their baby teach her to use words to express her feelings. It is through this consistent, repeated responsiveness that she begins to learn to soothe herself.

Here is a list of some of the most common reasons babies cry. In time, parents develop a mental checklist and go through it quickly as they try to determine how best to respond to a fussing baby. It is helpful to try different approaches; baby will indicate when his need is being met.

- Hunger
- Fatigue
- Loneliness
- A need to be held
- A need for skin-to-skin contact
- Discomfort or gas
- Feeling too hot or too cold
- Perception of the mother’s stress
- Stress from too much stimulation
- Surprise from loud, sudden noises
- Food sensitivity to something directly ingested or passed through the mother’s milk
- Unidentified pain or medical problem

Some parents find that parenting their baby is more intense than they expected. “High-need” is a term used to describe the temperament of babies who are often fussy. Approximately 20% of the population is considered “highly sensitive” and many fussy babies appear more sensitive to the environment and stimulation. Experimenting with varying levels of activity, light, and noise will help determine if overstimulation is the source of a child’s anxiety. Practicing AP helps parents understand their child’s natural inner rhythms, and they often try to schedule around them.

Many new parents are relieved to learn that most babies need a lot of close physical contact. It is impossible to spoil a baby by holding him all the time; in fact, it is perfectly normal for babies to want this type of constant physical contact. Some babies tend to be more vocal about what they need, and adults may incorrectly perceive them as too demanding. These babies know what they want and how to ask for it! Parents are not “giving in” by responding to their child’s cries; they are creating an attachment that helps children grow up to be confident, secure adults.

Babies need to be responded to sensitively both during the day and at night. Allowing a baby to cry for prolonged periods of time causes the baby to experience abnormally high levels of stress creating an unbalanced chemical state in the baby’s brain. High stress levels can place the child at risk for physical and emotional problems later in life. More information on responding to a child’s nighttime needs is available in the Principle Engage in Nighttime Parenting, found on page 14 of this document.

Some parents find it difficult to be emotionally responsive, especially when feeling exhausted or experiencing a lot of stress in other areas of their lives. Balancing the needs of a sibling with that of a new baby, or the demands of being emotionally responsive to a high-needs baby can create frustration and exhaustion. Symptoms of burnout or inability to cope with baby’s needs are signals that extra support and/or professional help are necessary. Parents can read more in the Principle Strive for Balance in Personal and Family Life, found on page 29 of this document.
Responding to Tantrums and Strong Emotions

Just as it is critical to respond to a child’s nighttime needs, it is also important to respond sensitively to a child’s strong emotions, even when they manifest as negative behavior or tantrums. Parents model appropriate ways to deal with strong emotions when they respond sensitively to a child who is hurt or angry. Studies have shown that responding appropriately to a baby’s cries or strong emotions leads to better cognitive and language development. Likewise, older children develop empathy and show improved social function when parents respond with love and affirmation.

Temper tantrums are an outlet for emotions that are too powerful for a young child’s undeveloped brain to manage in a more acceptable way. Tantrums represent real emotions and should be taken seriously. A parent’s role in tantrums is to comfort the child, not to get angry or punish her. It is likely that the child will not be able to talk about her feelings, and she might respond best to soothing words and physical comfort. To calm the child, the parent must also be calm, and can use techniques such as distraction, cuddling, or if it is more comfortable for the child, sitting next to the child while talking gently to him.

More information on handling tantrums and strong emotions is available through resources listed in the API Bibliography.

Responding to the Older Child

As a child grows, responding with empathy, respecting the child’s feelings, and trying to understand the need underlying his outward behaviors will help parents maintain the close connection they nurtured when he was a baby. Young children continue to need a lot of loving attention. As toddlers begin to demonstrate more independence, parents can support their explorations by providing a safe environment for discovery and staying nearby to respond when needed. By showing interest in their toddlers’ activities and participating in child-directed play, parents build their children’s confidence and encourage the development of important skills. Throughout the early years, children require frequent feedback from their parents as they experiment with new skills and behaviors.

Children develop social skills based on interactions with their parents. Parents can set up appropriate play “dates” for their child, monitor the children’s play—intervening using positive discipline techniques to keep the children safe—and teach effective communication techniques and concepts of fair play. While some toddlers are ready and do enjoy more formal “preschool” environments, it is not necessary for “socialization” of young children. When evaluating any program in which parents are not included, consider the child’s readiness to separate from her parents and the amount and type of support provided by the adults supervising the program.

Provide Consistent Loving Care in the API Bibliography offers suggested resources for information on separation. The Principle of Practice Positive Discipline provides more helpful information about interacting with older children.

4. Use Nurturing Touch

Babies are born with urgent and intense needs and depend completely on others to meet them. Nurturing touch helps meet a baby’s need for physical contact, affection, security, stimulation, and movement. Parents who choose a nurturing approach to physical interactions with their children promote development of healthy attachments. Even as children get older their need to stay connected through touch remains strong.

Needs and the Benefits of Nurturing Touch

Nurturing touch stimulates growth-promoting hormones and improves intellectual and motor development immediately from birth. It also helps regulate babies’ temperature, heart rate, and sleep/wake patterns, especially when baby is held skin-to-skin. Research has shown that babies who receive nurturing touch gain weight faster, nurse better, are calmer, and have better intellectual and motor development. These babies are also able to be more quickly soothed when they cry.

There are also benefits to the parents who practice nurturing touch. The calming effects of nurturing touch help parents get to know their baby better, strengthening the emotional bonds between parent and child. Additionally, there
is a inverse relationship between nurturing touch and adult physical violence. Cultures that rate high in physical affection, touch, holding or carrying, rate low in adult physical violence. Those cultures rating low in physical touch rate high in adult physical violence.

How to Provide Nurturing Touch

There are many ways parents can meet their children’s need for nurturing touch. Skin-to-skin contact in the form of Kangaroo Care is especially effective with premature or newborn babies and helps them adjust to the outside world. Breastfeeding provides an excellent opportunity for a mother to snuggle skin-to-skin with her undressed infant. Bath time is another opportunity for skin-to-skin contact. The calming effects of nurturing touch are increased with the warmth of the bath water. Many parents find that it can be safer and easier to bathe with their infant, increasing opportunities for nurturing touch.

Massage is also an excellent way to provide nurturing touch to infants, and the benefits continue as children get older. Massage can soothe a colicky baby, help a child unwind before bedtime, and provide playful interaction between parent and child. While all parents can use massage as a special way to connect with their baby, it is a particularly wonderful tool for fathers to nurture their attachment relationship.

Carried babies cry less and are more calm and content. Infants who are carried see the world at their parents’ level but can also snuggle in when feeling overwhelmed or overstimulated. Carrying meets a baby’s need for physical contact, comfort, security, stimulation, and movement, all of which encourage neurological development. Many parents find babywearing extremely effective for meeting a child’s need for nurturing touch while on the go. “Babywearing” refers to carrying a baby in a sling or other soft carrier and provides the same benefits as carrying the baby in arms.

Many creative and fashionable baby/child carriers are available and are used across the world. Various carriers distribute the weight load of the child across the carrier’s body differently and allow the child to be positioned in several ways. Try multiple carriers and/or positions to determine what is most comfortable for parent and child, recognizing that carrier needs may change as the child grows. Some API support groups offer a “sling library” to give parents the opportunity to try on and experiment with different slings or carriers.

As children grow, they continue to need nurturing touch for comfort and connectedness. Babywearing can continue for as long as is comfortable for both parent and child. Many carriers can accommodate growing toddlers. Soft carriers provide special security to the older child in busy and crowded locations.

Most soft baby carriers can be used for discrete breastfeeding. This helps mothers who are uncomfortable breastfeeding in public—or those whose babies nurse frequently due to growth spurts or teething—to nurse their babies on cue while going about their daily business. Soft carriers may offer more comfort and protection for babies who are otherwise easily distracted from nursing.

Gentle movement may be helpful as a child acclimates to a new carrier. Walking or swaying with the baby in the carrier may approximate the baby’s experience in the womb and make the carrier feel more familiar and comfortable. Parents can also support the baby with their hand(s) until both parent and child feel comfortable that the carrier is secure.

There are many devices that can be used to hold a baby independently that, if overused, do not promote attachment (swings, jumpers, plastic carriers, or car seats when not being used for safety reasons). Parents using these devices should be sensitive to the baby’s behavior and body language, and they must be conscious to avoid the overuse of these products. If using a stroller or baby carriage, use a brand that allows the baby to face the parent rather than looking away. Some children like the security of seeing their parents especially since very young children don’t yet understand where their parents have gone when they are out of sight.

Nurturing Touch and the Older Child

Even after they’ve outgrown being carried, children still need touch. An overwhelmed toddler may be comforted by the familiar security of being carried. Be assured that carrying a baby into toddlerhood and beyond will not “spoil” the baby. Parents can follow the child’s lead and try not to make him feel bad about still wanting to feel the
closeness that carrying provides. If your find your child is too heavy to hold comfortably, take a few minutes out, if possible, to provide attention or comfort in your lap.

Frequent hugs, snuggling, back rubs, and massage all meet the older child’s need for touch, as do more physical play such as wrestling and tickling. Use playfulness and games to encourage physical closeness in a child who is resistant and remember that touch is an ongoing need throughout life.

Children need various types of play, from rough-and-tumble wrestling to imagination games. Many girls and boys, even sometimes as babies, enjoy some rough-and-tumble play, and it can strengthen attachment. Often parents find themselves specializing in only one type of play and may even be uncomfortable with other types. This can be especially true for play that on the surface seems violent or mean. But these types of play serve an important purpose for children who are working through emotions, processing the images they see in the media, and exploring their own ability to control aggression. Children benefit immensely when each parent can actively engage in all types of play, including those that require parents to challenge their own comfort levels. It is important, however, for parents to remember to respect the child’s boundaries. Sometimes eye contact, a wink, or a smile is enough to connect with an older child, and wrestling or tickling should never be forced.

Parents should also remember to use nurturing touch with partners and other loved ones! All humans thrive on touch and the reconnection it provides.

5. Engage in Nighttime Parenting

“Is your baby sleeping through the night?” is often the first question people ask a new parent. The truth is that most young babies do not sleep through the night, it is simply a myth that is perpetuated from generation to generation. Babies have needs at night just as they do during the day—hunger, loneliness, fear, feeling too cold or too hot—and therefore they need the reassurance of a loving parent to help them feel secure during the night. Many babies do go through a phase where they sleep for longer periods of time, only to begin waking at night during different developmental stages. They may wake occasionally during nightmares, teething, illness, growth spurts, or during times of transition in their lives. Babies are very sensitive to their parents’ stress, which can affect their sleep patterns.

Parents can help their children learn that bedtime or naptime is a peaceful time; a time of quiet connection and snuggles. Even though young children may outgrow needing to eat during the night, they might still require comfort and reassurance.

Parents who are frustrated by frequent waking or are sleep-deprived may be tempted to try sleep training techniques that recommend letting a baby “cry it out” incrementally. It was once believed to be healthy to “teach” a baby to “self-soothe.” New research suggests that these techniques can have detrimental physiological effects on the baby by increasing the stress hormone, cortisol, in the brain. The increase in cortisol can have long-term effects on emotional regulation, sleep patterns, and behavior. An infant is not neurologically or developmentally capable of calming or soothing himself to sleep in ways that are healthy. The part of the brain that allows him to begin the process of learning to regulate his own emotions, or self-soothe, isn’t well developed until he is two-and-a-half to three years of age. Babies and young children depend on their parents to help them calm down and learn to regulate their intense feelings.

Sleep Arrangements

It’s important to note that infant solitary sleep is a relatively new practice that has evolved in the western world only within the last 100 years. Recently, there have been efforts by various medical and professional organizations to discourage parents from sleeping with their children for fear that it contributes to an increase in Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). However, new research demonstrates that sharing sleep, when practiced by informed parents, can be safe and beneficial. In fact, many cultures where parents routinely sleep with their children report some of the lowest SIDS rates. In some of these cultures SIDS is non-existent.

API encourages parents to respond to their children’s needs at night just as they do during the day. Parents are also encouraged to explore the variety of different sleeping arrangements, and to choose the approach that best allows them to be responsive at night. Individual babies’ sleep patterns and needs vary a great deal. Remain flexible and
understand that it is developmentally appropriate and normal for babies to wake up during the night to feed and seek contact.

“Co-sleeping,” “bedsharing,” and the “family bed” are terms used interchangeably to describe a sleep arrangement where the family members sleep on the same sleep surface (see Ten Safe Co-sleeping Guidelines, below). Co-sleeping is also used to refer to sleeping in “close proximity,” which means the child is on a separate sleep surface in the same room as the parents. This includes the use of a bassinet, or a “co-sleeper” or “sidecar” which is a crib-like bed with only three walls, with the fourth side remaining open and pushed up against the parents’ bed.

The surface of a co-sleeper or sidecar should be at the same level as the parents’ mattress and should not have gaps between the two surfaces. Older children can sleep on a futon or mattress in the parents’ room. When they are ready, older siblings can co-sleep in their own room.

Families who choose to co-sleep should follow API's Ten Safe Co-sleeping Guidelines:

1. Avoid smoking around baby, day or night. Babies, who are around smoke, even if it isn’t in the bedroom, are at greater risk of SIDS.
2. Never co-sleep when under the influence of alcohol, illegal drugs, or prescription or over-the-counter medications that cause drowsiness.
3. Always place baby to sleep on her back.
4. Baby should sleep next to mother, rather than between mother and father.
5. Use a large bed with a mattress that fits snugly against the rail or that is flush against a wall. Choose a firm mattress, free from fluffy bedding and stuffed animals.
6. Use safety measures such as side rails, bed extenders, and safe placement of the family bed. Fill in any crevice with a rolled-up baby blanket or towel.
7. Adjust baby’s clothing based on her sleeping arrangements. A baby sleeping alone in a crib needs warmer pajamas than a child who co-sleeps and gets warmth from her parents. Overheating can be dangerous to infants.
8. Never leave a baby unattended in an adult bed.
9. Never place a baby on a couch, beanbag chair, or waterbed to sleep.
10. Do not allow babysitters or older siblings to sleep with baby.

There are many benefits—for parents and children—to co-sleeping or sleeping in close proximity. When co-sleeping, the baby experiences more periods of light sleep that have proven to be beneficial to stabilizing heart rates, breathing patterns, and a decreased risk of SIDS. Baby feels warm and secure, and therefore he cries less. Parents report that they get more sleep with fewer interruptions. They don’t need to get up to attend to baby’s needs, which prevents parents from having to wake up fully during feedings. Mothers worry less about their infants at night when they can reach out and touch the baby, and both parents develop a closer bond with the baby.

In addition to these benefits, co-sleeping also enhances the breastfeeding and attachment relationships. Breastfeeding is better established through frequent nursing. Co-sleeping improves mother’s milk supply, increases the number of feedings, and increases the duration of the breastfeeding relationship.

Nighttime Routines

Regardless of which sleeping arrangement a family chooses, nighttime routines help everyone unwind from a busy day and help establish healthier sleep habits. A pleasant bedtime routine may include playing soft music, giving the baby/child a warm bath and/or a massage, rocking, reading, or singing to the child, and reducing stimulation in the period before bedtime.

Other recommendations include turning off the TV, avoidance of caffeine- or sugar-containing drinks or food (such as chocolate, soda, or tea,) by breastfeeding mothers and children, dimming the lights, or reducing noisy activities before bedtime.
Parents can experiment to find the routine that works best for their child and remember that any bedtime routine will likely take more than ten minutes—sometimes closer to 30 minutes to an hour or more.

Some parents find it helpful to begin to quiet down the environment two hours before bedtime. While many children calm down easily, others experience a high-energy spurt just before bedtime, and may need high-energy play before they can relax. Some children are relaxed by a bath, while others are excited by it. Do what works to help each individual child prepare for sleep, and remember the importance of a regular bedtime that is early enough to allow sufficient sleep if the child must wake early for school or other activities.

Keep in mind that sleep routines change as the child grows and matures. It helps to keep a sense of humor and to remain flexible. Bed times may shift earlier or later as nap schedules and sleep needs change, and the total amount of sleep that a child needs decreases as he gets older. When a child transitions out of a nap or starts school, it can cause sleep cycles to become erratic. Illness and growth spurts can also contribute to changing sleep patterns. Through all of these changes, parents help the child learn to trust her body when she is tired by recognizing the signs of tiredness and not forcing her to sleep when she is not tired, or keeping her awake when she needs sleep, just for the sake of a routine.

There are no set rules for nighttime parenting. Considering the needs of each family member will help make the best choice for each family. Some parents do not feel comfortable with the idea of having a baby sleep in their bed. It’s important to discuss individual feelings and to resolve any concerns in a way that is respectful to each parent while still meeting the baby’s nighttime needs.

When the time comes for a child to transition to her own bed, parents should make sure that the transition is gentle and that they respond to any feelings of fear or upset experienced by the child. This is especially true when a child is transitioning due to the birth of a sibling, as the child may already have some anxiety related to the birth. Young children who have their own bed 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. Children outgrow this need when they are developmentally ready and will happily go to sleep on their own. Older children may still enjoy a brief snuggle time with parents before bed.

When considering the different possible sleeping arrangements, some parents are concerned about how co-sleeping will impact intimacy with their partner. Neither parenthood nor co-sleeping needs to put a damper on intimacy; a little creativity, including timing and location, can ensure that intimacy is not disrupted by a new baby.

6. Provide Consistent Loving Care

Babies and young children have an intense need for the physical presence of a consistent, loving, responsive caregiver—ideally a parent. Daily care and playful, loving interactions build strong bonds. By providing consistent, loving care from early infancy, parents strengthen their relationship with their child and build a healthy attachment. If neither parent can be a full-time caregiver, then a child needs someone who is not only consistent and loving, but who has formed a bond with her and consciously parents in a way that strengthens the attachment relationship.

Create Schedules with Baby in Mind

Instead of trying to fit a new baby into the existing pre-baby schedule, parents can come up with creative ways to design new routines that include the baby. This may mean taking a sleeping newborn out on date night, getting exercise by taking walks with baby in a sling, or working with employers to customize a schedule that maximizes parents’ time with their child. Parents can take a trusted caregiver with them if they go out for a long evening or special event; many babies are happy to stroll around a restaurant or other interesting environment with a caregiver, allowing parents some time to be alone. This technique also works well for family vacations or business trips.

Being together as a family in the first months of a baby’s life allows parents to solidify parenting views and ensure that the baby is receiving consistent care. A baby thrives when she knows what to expect and when her needs are met in a consistent and loving manner by caregivers (babies love predictability). In the early months, a baby’s natural attachment-promoting behaviors along with a mother’s instinctual drive for caregiving work together to develop a strong bond. Families can support the breastfeeding relationship of mother and baby by helping them to stay close
Practical Tips for Short Separations

Although having one or both parents providing consistent, loving care at all times is certainly the ideal, it is not always possible. If parents need to be separated from an infant or young child for a short time, the following tips may help minimize stress and fear:

- Leave the child with a trusted caretaker whom the child is attached to and who is familiar with, supportive of, and willing to use Attachment Parenting principles.
- Respect the child’s feelings and follow his lead about his readiness to separate. Being empathic, understanding, and patient allows the child to adjust to separations according to his own timetable.
- Talk to older children about the separation. Parents should let the child know they are leaving, call to check in, and let them know when they can expect to see their parents again.
- Accept that even older children have occasional difficulties with separation from one or both parents. Toddlers and older children naturally like to be with their parents, and some level of separation anxiety is perfectly normal and age-appropriate. Parents know their child better than anyone and can judge when his anxiety is unusually problematic. If this is the case, it is necessary to evaluate other factors in the child’s life that need special attention.
- Use creativity to help avoid unnecessary anxiety-producing experiences. For example, some parents have found that it is easier for a young child to separate if the child is picked up for an outing with a caregiver rather than the parent(s) leaving the child at the caregiver’s home.

When the child becomes verbal, she will be better able to handle separation, especially if she has a solidly attached relationship with her parents as a foundation. She will be better able to communicate her feelings, signaling her parents that she is ready for short separations, and also allowing parents to check in with her during those separations.

Parents must avoid using shame, fear, threats, or intimidation to force the separation, or to attempt to prevent children from crying about it. This can prolong and exacerbate a child’s fears of separation. Be especially aware of the preverbal child’s reaction and behavior both when the parent leaves and when parent and child are reunited. The child may cry, be extremely clingy, or may suddenly revert to a less mature behavior; parents must take into account their child’s personality and developmental stage in assessing whether the separation or childcare situation is causing anxiety or stress.

Some children seem to accept separations that are not their choice, only to later display negative behavior or sadness caused by the stress they have experienced. Therefore, it is important to be aware of the child’s reactions and sensitive to his feelings. Parents may acknowledge a child’s feelings by articulating what he must be feeling; “You feel sad because mommy left, don’t you?” Long separations can cause a baby to go through feelings of grief and loss and can affect her attachment to her parents. Therefore, it is critically important that parents who are separated from their children spend focused and intentional time reconnecting with their child after separation.

Children are ready for separation at different ages, but research shows separations of longer than two nights can be very difficult for children under the age of three. Likewise, daycare situations that exceed 20 hours per week can be extremely stressful and detrimental to the long-term health of children under the age of 30 months. If families need childcare for more than 20 hours per week due to their employment or other situations, in-home care by a trusted caregiver is preferable to care provided outside of the home because the child benefits from the security and continuity of her familiar home environment.

Working and Alternate Caregivers

The decision to return to work or to stay at home can be difficult. Parents must weigh the costs—both financial and emotional—and consider alternatives that allow one parent to stay home. Find out if employers offer a leave of
absence; a parent may be able to return to work after a year or two without sacrificing her career path. If a parent has the option of staying home for the first few years of a child’s life, they should consider doing so in order to optimally foster a secure primary attachment bond.

Parents can explore a variety of economic and work-arrangement options that permit their child to be cared for by one or both parents at all times. For example, a family can consider ideas for cutting expenses, or they may be able to use financial assets they already have so that one parent can be home. Today’s workplace is increasingly flexible and family friendly, providing employees with the opportunity to explore different work situations that best fit their family’s needs.

For example, telecommuting, or working from home, can allow both parents to interact with baby during the day. Some employers allow parents to bring the baby to the workplace for breastfeeding or checking in. Working part-time, working as a consultant, working on limited projects, or participating in a job share can all allow parents more access to their infant during the critical first year of life and beyond.

Parents whose work situation does not lend itself to this type of flexibility have even more reason to practice Attachment Parenting. If separations are inevitable, parents should attempt a gradual transition to the child’s new caregiver. Being sensitive and responsive to the child’s needs or feelings, holding, and cuddling help parents and babies reconnect after being apart.

Parents who plan to return to work shortly after the birth of their baby sometimes tell their doctor or friends that they are afraid to get “too attached” to their baby. Research shows that it is detrimental for parents to distance themselves emotionally from their baby because it can permanently impact their growing relationship with the baby. Whether parents must return to work or not, nurturing feelings of attachment toward the unborn baby is a critical first step in an attached relationship and prevents parents from having difficulty understanding and responding to their baby’s needs.

If returning to work best meets a family’s needs, they should consider the following:

- It is extremely important to have continuity of care with a consistent, loving, caregiver. If parents must leave the baby, they should make sure the caregiver is someone who makes the baby’s needs their top priority. Ideally the caregiver will be someone who already understands the importance of choosing attachment-promoting practices. When possible, choosing a family member, close friend, or someone with whom parents have an ongoing relationship will reduce the incidence of caregiver turnover.

- Parents should expect and encourage their child to form an attachment to the caregiver. They should consider introducing the caregiver to *The Eight Principles of Attachment Parenting* and explaining to the caregiver how they want the baby to be responded to and cared for. Parents may want to consider providing the caregiver with a sling to carry the baby.

- Parents should give the child time to get to know a new caregiver in the parents’ presence. Parents should begin the transition well in advance of any separation so that it is a gradual process and is comfortable for the child.

- Avoid “caregiver roulette.” Frequent turnover of caregivers can be very damaging to the attachment process. One-on-one care with a consistent, loving caregiver is optimal when separation from both parents is inevitable.

- Minimizing the number of hours in nonparental care as much as possible provides the best opportunity for a child to build secure attachments with parents.

- Parents should find ways to reconnect with their children when separated because of employment. Parents can include a child in day-to-day tasks, and they should remember to spend non-work time with the family.

Some families find themselves in a difficult situation because of work schedules, divorce, or shared custody. Information on providing consistent and loving care during these difficult situations is available through
resources listed in the API Bibliography.

7. Practice Positive Discipline

Attachment Parenting incorporates the “golden rule” of parenting; parents should treat their children the way they would want to be treated if they were the child. Positive discipline is an overarching philosophy that helps a child develop a conscience guided by his own internal discipline and compassion for others. Positive discipline is rooted in a secure, trusting, connected relationship between parent and child. Discipline that is empathetic, loving, and respectful strengthens the connection between parent and child, while harsh or overly punitive discipline weakens the connection. Parents must remember that the ultimate goal of discipline is to help children develop self-control and self-discipline.

The Dangers of Traditional Discipline

Manipulative, coercive, or physical forms of discipline can interfere with the connection between parent and child. Instilling fear in children serves no purpose and creates feelings of shame and humiliation. Fear has been shown to lead to an increased risk of future antisocial behavior including crime and substance abuse. Children raised with fear learn to behave positively only when they are in sight of their parents or another authority figure. They may fear punishment, or they may fear a loss of parental love and affection. Although fear may change behavior in the short term, it will not have the desired effects in the long term.

Likewise, spanking a child or using other physical discipline techniques may temporarily stop a behavior, but it does not teach the child appropriate self discipline. Instead, studies show that it can create ongoing behavioral and emotional problems. Harsh, physical discipline teaches children that violence is the only way to solve problems. Controlling or manipulative discipline compromises the trust between parent and child, and harms the attachment bond.

Parents who want to practice positive discipline sometimes have difficulty communicating with, understanding, or feeling empathy toward their child. Parenting promises intense and challenging moments and despite a desire to practice Attachment Parenting, some parents react harshly to, or feel at risk for hitting, their child. It is a sign of strength and personal growth for a parent to examine his or her own childhood experiences and how they may negatively impact their parenting, and to seek help if they are unable to practice positive discipline.

A Gentler Approach to Discipline

The concept of positive discipline as defined by API is very different from what is generally practiced in modern cultures. It calls for a paradigm shift in the way children are treated. Rather than reacting to behavior by yelling, threatening, or using physical punishment, positive discipline requires parents to uncover the needs leading to the behavior. It requires positive communication and crafting solutions together with the child while keeping everyone’s dignity intact.

Positive discipline begins at birth. By consistently and compassionately responding to an infant’s needs, a trusting bond is formed. Babies learn to communicate needs effectively, and parents develop an intuitive sense of interpreting their babies’ signals. Baby learns that her needs will be met, and a mutual sensitivity is formed between parent and child. This strong bond of attachment and trust becomes the foundation of discipline. As the child grows, parents must continue to elicit the child’s trust by continuing to build on this attachment.

Positive discipline uses techniques such as prevention, distraction, and substitution to gently guide toddlers and young children away from harm. Parents are instrumental in helping their children explore safely by seeing the world through their children’s eyes and empathizing as children experience the natural consequences of their actions. Parents practicing positive discipline understand developmentally appropriate behavior, and tailor loving guidance to the needs and temperaments of their children.

This type of discipline also involves creating a positive learning environment. The word “discipline” is derived from the word “disciple,” meaning one who follows another’s teachings. Children learn by example, so it’s important that parents strive to model positive actions and relationships within a family and with others—parents must strive to be
the kind of adults they would like their children to be.

Most parents wish they could handle every situation perfectly, but chances are there will be times when tempers flare and patience is lost. When parents react in a way that creates tension, anger, or hurt feelings, they can repair any damage to the parent-child relationship by taking time to reconnect and apologize later.

**Tools for Positive Discipline**

Parents find the following tools useful when using positive discipline. This list is not all-inclusive, and some techniques described may not be suitable for children of a particular age or temperament. Parents seeking more information on positive discipline may refer to the discipline section of the API bibliography.

- **Maintain a Positive Relationship** Resolve to maintain a positive relationship with the child, even in the most difficult situations. Stay focused on identifying needs and exploring solutions. Through all stages of development, children are observing their parents and internalizing parental behaviors as appropriate. It is important for parents to model the kind of adult they would like their child to become.

- **Use Empathy and Respect** Be empathetic and respectful by acknowledging a child’s feelings, keeping his needs, abilities, and developmental level in mind, and using a win-win attitude that seeks to meet as many needs as possible.

- **Research Positive Discipline** Read books that focus on positive communication and discipline and talk to like-minded parents with children of similar ages. These resources offer reassurance and helpful parenting suggestions.

- **Understand the Unmet Need** Try to determine what need a child’s behavior is communicating. Children often communicate their feelings through their behavior. By looking at the world through their eyes, parents model the first lesson of empathy. Helping the child think about and understand what others are feeling also fosters this empathy. As with all learning, it is a lifelong process, and parents are encouraged to explore effective methods of communicating.

Recognize and meet the child’s need for nutrition, rest, and comfort. When children are cranky and not behaving their best, it’s often because they are hungry, tired, or feeling a lack of connection, and they need their “emotional tank” to be refilled.

Parents can express their unmet needs in addition to those of the child. “You are really enjoying watching the construction truck. It’s so much fun! I am worried about the ice cream in our trunk. If we don’t get home soon, it will melt, and I’m really looking forward to eating it.”

Breastfeeding mothers may find that breastfeeding during times of stress or anxiety can help mother and child reconnect emotionally, thus alleviating some of these negative feelings.

Recognize the child’s need for undivided parental attention. Take the time to play with, nurse, and snuggle with the child. This nurturing touch and affection helps build the parent-child connection and teaches him about playing with others as he grows. Often younger children won’t develop an interest in playing with others until after two years of age.

- **Work Out a Solution Together** Propose a solution, or ask an older child to propose one. Be open to creative solutions that meet both the parent’s and the child’s needs. This negotiation of simple conflicts teaches her valuable conflict-resolution skills.

- **Be Proactive** Attachment Parenting is proactive parenting. Try to monitor the child and watch for the early signs of a problem or unmet need. Get involved quickly before major issues arise. It only takes a second for a situation to get out of control. It’s much easier to avoid a situation than it is to deal with it after the fact.

- **Understand the Child’s Developmental Abilities** Preverbal children often cannot understand concepts such as sharing, and developmentally they have little or no impulse control. Therefore, creating lots of rules and restrictions is likely to be an exercise in frustration for parent and child. Use distraction to guide a baby or toddler...
away from dangerous areas or to divert their attention to something else.

Understand basic child development and develop appropriate expectations based on the child’s age and abilities. While developmental milestones provide only general ranges and may not exactly correspond to a particular child’s situation, they provide a good starting place. When parents have a better understanding of normal, age-appropriate behavior, they are less likely to overreact to the child’s behavior.

Create a “Yes” Environment Before saying “no,” stop to think “why not?” If the activity is inconvenient rather than dangerous, consider allowing it. If there is a way that a toddler can attempt to navigate a desired path or activity with parental assistance, provide it. If there is not a safe way to jointly complete the activity, try substituting something similar. Rather than saying no, try telling the child what he can do instead.

Discipline Through Play Turn power struggles into playful games. Use imaginative play to work through conflicts. If a child cannot have what he wants, help him to create an imaginary scene where he can. Find the fun in everyday tasks and transitions.

Change Things Up Change the environment by breastfeeding, cuddling, singing, dancing, or being silly. A change of pace can be very helpful in relieving the stress of a situation, giving parents and children a mental break and allowing them to reconnect in a fun way without parents feeling the need to resort to more punitive discipline.

State Facts State a fact rather than making a demand. For example, by saying “You are close to the edge of the stairs,” or “that vase is glass and will break very easily,” allows the child to internalize the danger and decide for himself what action is needed to mitigate it. For younger toddlers, or in areas where the child has no experience, tell the child exactly what is expected of him. For example, “Let Mommy help you set it on the table very slowly and softly, like this, so that it won’t break.”

Avoid Labels Avoid labeling children and focus instead on the behavior and the need that it is not meeting. For example, do not call a child “naughty boy” or “clumsy girl.” Instead, describe the preferred behavior in language the child can understand, for example, “Be gentle with the kitty because so he feels safe,” or “Hold the cup with both hands so it doesn’t spill.”

Use Affirmative Language Make requests in the affirmative, “I need you to sit on the chair, please.” rather than the negative, “Don’t stand on the chair!”, and provide a need-based reason whenever possible.

Natural Consequences Natural consequences can be excellent teachers. Parents should intervene if a natural consequence would be harmful, too scary, or if the child is cognitively unable to connect the action and the consequence. Parents should also be prepared to assist when a natural consequence occurs, especially when that consequence is not one the child expected. For example, if a child goes out without a coat, bring one along for when he realizes that he is cold. Empathize with the child about his feelings (e.g. that he’s cold) rather than saying “I told you so!”

Parents say they experience a great sense of satisfaction and connection with their child when they are able to resolve a problem together that leaves everyone’s dignity intact. Once the child is calm and receptive, and in this case, warm, talk about what he can do differently to prevent the same thing from happening again. Think of using the child’s behavior as an opportunity to teach rather than punish. Not only does this behavior produce better results with the child, but it can also be a learning opportunity for parents to grow while strengthening the parent-child relationship

Be Sensitive to Strong Emotions Be sensitive to crying and tantrums, which can be a child’s way of communicating or releasing strong emotions. Keeping the child safe (which may require relocating the child) while being calm and empathic to the child’s immediate needs communicates unconditional understanding, love, and acceptance. It may not be helpful to try to stop the crying or tantrum if the child is working through strong feelings. A parent’s empathetic presence may be all that is needed. It may help the child if an adult can help him put his feelings into words, or fantasize with him about what he wished had happened. After the child is calm, discuss the situation that caused the tantrum and help the child to use words to express his emotions and deal with
the situation in the future.

When parents build a foundation of trust and love with their infants and toddlers, positive discipline becomes the norm as their children grow. They become increasingly better able to negotiate mutually agreeable solutions to problems of conflicting needs. Positive discipline at this stage involves listening compassionately to the needs of the children, helping them to understand why limits and restrictions exist, and working out solutions that take into consideration everyone’s needs. This style of discipline continues to strengthen the connection that parents developed with their children in infancy.

**Use Time-In rather than Time-Out** Time-out is a term that is used to describe a variety of discipline techniques. One popular version involves putting a child on a chair or in a room, separated from his parent, for a given amount of time. Like spanking, this punitive version of time-out has not proven to be effective because it doesn’t address the root of the problem. Further, separating a child from his parents may be perceived by the child as rejection. Dr. Gordon Neufeld reminds us that a child does not have a behavior problem; he has a relationship problem. Positive discipline replaces the punitive use of time-out with another version of the technique, which API prefers to call “time-in.” Time-in is an opportunity to reconnect and work through the underlying problem that your child is having. In order to help an older toddler or child regain composure and perspective, explain to the child that both of you need to take some time away from the activity. If he is ready and willing, you can sit with your child and discuss his emotions and needs in a calm, compassionate way. In some cases, snuggle time without talking may be all that a child needs. When both you and your child are calm and ready, then he can return to the activity. Consider implementing a “meeting-on-the-couch” policy, where any member of the family (including the child) can call a “time-in” when tensions begin to arise, or when he feels the need for a period of reconnection.

**Parental Time-In** Parental time-in is also an effective way for parents to regain composure and perspective. Parents can explain to the child that they are going to sit quietly for a bit and think. They can use this time to examine their expectations both of themselves and their child. If a child resists the parent taking a time-in or the child is too young to be out of the sight of the parent, then the parent can sit calmly in the same room, close her eyes, take a few deep breaths, and have an internal “time-in.”

If a parent feels at risk for harming their child, they must take the steps necessary to ensure the child is in a safe location and separate themselves rather than reaching the breaking point—don’t hesitate to call a friend or neighbor for help. For more information on how to deal with anger toward a child, see http://www.stophitting.com.

**Talk to the Child Before Intervening** If a child is having a conflict with peer, talk to the child before directly intervening whenever possible. In circumstances where someone could get hurt, swift action may be required to ensure everyone’s safety, but many times asking the child how she’s feeling and why she did a particular thing yields better results than immediately intervening.

For example, if the child hurts someone, it is a good opportunity to model empathy. Remove the child from the situation and talk to him about what is happening. Listen to his emotions, helping him put words to his feelings, then point out the emotions of the other child. Talking to the child about the other child’s feelings models an appropriate response and teaches both empathy and positive communication skills. Consider pointing out the expression on the other child’s face, or discuss how he may be feeling. Ask him if he would like to do anything to make the other child feel better. Ask him if he wants to apologize, and honor his answer. He may or may not feel remorseful, and may be unwilling to apologize. Parents who apologize themselves should be sure their child understands they are modeling an appropriate apology (“I’m sorry that you got hurt”), not apologizing on the child’s behalf (“Jack is sorry”).

**Don't Force Apologies** Many parents remember being forced to apologize to another as a child, whether it was a sincere apology or not. It probably made the parents feel better but it did nothing to make the hurt child feel better, nor did it teach the children anything about resolving conflicts in a positive way. Apologies should come from a child’s heart and be a genuine expression of their feelings. Allow the child to apologize in his own way, understanding that if he does not verbally apologize, he has witnessed appropriate role modeling and will begin to
apologize to others when he is developmentally ready and feels genuine remorse. Children raised with empathy are much more likely to feel compassion and spontaneously apologize.

**Comfort the Hurt Child First** Although it is difficult for a parent to see their child hurt by another, it is important for parents to go immediately to their own child when he is hurt and comfort him, letting the parents of the aggressor deal with her in their own way. However, note that it may be necessary to separate the hurt child from the aggressor if the aggressive child’s parents are unavailable or not immediately responding to the situation. It doesn’t help the situation to make negative comments to the aggressive child or to her parent if the parent is present, but rather the intervention should be about protection and comfort for the hurt child. After comforting the hurt child, attention can turn to the aggressive child if she is also in your care. Talk to her about what she did and how it made the other child feel, and explore with her other ways of solving the conflict or expressing her frustration.

**Offer Choices** When offering choices, avoid masking a threat as one of the choices. If there is an underlying act that the child does not wish to complete, then state it first. “I know that you want to stay here and play, because you’re having so much fun! But we must go now because we need to pick your brother up from soccer practice. Would you like to race me to the car, or would you prefer to ride the tricycle there?” Saying “Would you like to walk to the car on your own, or would you like me to carry you?” is not a choice; it is a threat (unless the child might like to be carried). If the child is unwilling to select a choice, try another tool.

**Using Logical Consequences** In some cases, it may be appropriate to calmly communicate a non-negotiable need and a resulting logical consequence if the need isn’t met. A logical consequence should be directly related to meeting a need, and as non-punitive and minimally intervening as possible. For example, if a child is coloring on the wall, and other proposed solutions (such as putting paper on the wall to color on) have been unsuccessful, then the parent might say, “I need for the wall to not have crayon on it. If you color on the wall again, I will have to take the crayons away to protect the wall.” Continue to explore potential solutions, and be open to creativity from the child. Do not continue to impose a forced solution once a better solution is suggested.

Treat her disappointment and anger to imposed solutions or consequences with understanding and compassion. Nobody likes to be forced into doing something that they don’t want to do especially when they don’t understand why they have to do it. Children may not have the developmental ability to understand the needs of adults. The act of imposing a solution on the child that is not mutually agreeable may leave her feeling wounded. Consider ways to offer extra attention to repair the connection.

**Using Praise** Use praise carefully. Thanking the child for helping out or doing something nice is more meaningful than just saying “Good job.” Some praise, rewards, and value judgments may be experienced by a child as disingenuous or manipulative. Of course everyone loves to be praised and acknowledged occasionally, but the overuse of praise and rewards can place an inappropriate value on a child’s activities. This may in turn interfere with the child’s intrinsic motivation, decision-making skills, and his ability to self-evaluate, inadvertently encouraging the child to constantly seek approval.

As with other types of discipline, parents are in the best position to evaluate how to use these techniques and their effect on the child. Sharing feelings and describing what the child has accomplished with genuine enthusiasm—separate from the desire to change or shape a child’s behavior—can build an authentic, straightforward relationship. For example, “Your toys are all in the toy bin!” said in an excited voice. Consider celebrating the effort rather than the result, such as “You worked very hard on that puzzle!”, so that children know their efforts are worthwhile even if they don’t always succeed.

**Use Incentives Creatively** As children grow, they may recognize habits in themselves that they would like to change. Incentives are most effective when the child genuinely desires to change a behavior, and has input into developing the incentive. The incentive should be something small and fun, but not something that would be seen as a punishment if it were not received. This is an opportunity for the child to dialogue with the parent as to whether this is a strategy that she would like to try and to reevaluate if it doesn’t seem to be working. In other words, this technique is not something the parent would arbitrarily use without the child’s input and consent. If at any point she chooses not to, a parent should accept this decision without shame or humiliation.
If over time, the child consistently chooses not to change the behavior, then the parent should explore whether the child has an underlying unmet need leading to the behavior and discuss the situation with the child.

**Consider Carefully Before Imposing the Parent’s Will on the Child**

Parents should think carefully before imposing their will on a child. First, make all attempts to find a solution that meets the needs of the child. If a parent determines that a solution cannot be reached that meets all needs, and that there is a particular need of their own that cannot be delayed or remain unmet, first attempt to use playfulness, offer choices, or distract or redirect the child to another activity. If this is unsuccessful, then state the need and intervene in a way that shows respect for the child’s feelings and desires.

Meet as many of the child’s needs as possible, and be open to creative solutions. For example, “Wow, that fire engine makes a great sound. You are sure having fun. I need to make a phone call now about our play date tomorrow and I need to be able to hear, so the firetruck must be quiet for a while. Would you rather play with the fire engine with the siren turned off, or would you rather put the fire engine away for a bit and play with the dump truck until I’m through talking?”.

Learning to use positive discipline may not come easily for many parents, especially if they were raised in a more traditional, authoritarian environment. That’s why it’s so important to attend API support groups, talk with other parents or seek professional help.

8. **Strive for Balance in Personal and Family Life**

Striving for balance involves ensuring that everyone’s needs—not just the child’s—are recognized, validated, and met to the greatest extent possible without sacrificing anyone’s emotional or physical health. In an ideal world, every family member’s needs are met all the time, everyone is happy and healthy, and the family is perfectly in balance. In the real world, nobody’s family life is perfectly balanced all the time. It is not unusual for parents to feel out of balance at times. Parents who practice AP continuously look for creative ways to find balance in their personal and family life.

**Balance is the Foundation Upon Which Attachment Grows**

Balance, like *Responding with Sensitivity*, permeates all of *The Eight Principles of Attachment Parenting*. When in balance, family members are better able to be emotionally responsive. In turn, more emotionally responsive family members are more loving, more nurturing, and more supportive of each other, making it natural to seek out and embrace the other ideals of Attachment Parenting.

Many families today live a good distance from extended family members, which is a relatively new phenomenon in the history of mankind. In generations past, new parents had their own parents, siblings, aunts, and uncles to help with the household tasks, mentor the young family, and to provide much needed support when a new baby was born. Today, many families find themselves living away from their own communities and feeling very isolated.

The best defense for feeling isolated is to look outward to create a support network in the local community. Parents can meet other parents through online parenting message boards, childbirth classes, breastfeeding support groups, and API parent support groups. Finding like-minded friends is critical to meet the challenges of the myriad decisions parents face with childrearing. This network can provide support, even when parents don’t feel supported by the greater community. Parents should not be afraid to ask for help once this community is established, especially if there is a new baby in the family. Parents could ask a friend to bring over some prepared meals, to help with the household chores, such as cleaning, laundry, or dishes, or to simply answer the phone or door while the exhausted new parents enjoy some solitude—resting, reading, or even taking a bath. Parents can give a helper a grocery list and send them to the store or have them run an errand. They can ask for a shoulder or foot massage. Sometimes it can be comforting just having a good friend in another room who is willing to help.

Even with ample support from the outside, parents must look inward for family and individual balance. They must take into consideration the needs of each family member: When one person is out of balance, everyone else is affected. Certainly, the child’s needs must be a priority, and the younger the child, the more intense and immediate his
needs. While his needs might take priority in the early months, AP parents know that meeting their child’s needs early on will allow him to become more autonomous naturally as he grows and matures. Even so, he is one piece of the complete family picture that also includes the needs of the parents as individuals and as a couple, siblings, plus the family as a whole.

Maintaining balance can be challenging for people who are parenting alone or whose partners are away for long periods of time. In these situations, it is extremely important to develop a support network so that parents can attend to their own self-care, not only their child’s. Parents should not let pride interfere with asking for help; healthy parents are better able to be responsive to their children.

**Practical Tips for Maintaining Balance**

Enjoy today! Children grow up so quickly. The intense newborn stage passes in the blink of an eye; the infant stage is gone in two blinks. Accept wholeheartedly a new unpredictable life as a parent. Simply accepting the situation often makes the challenges easier to manage. Parents hear, “After you have a baby, your life will never be the same.” Some parents try to “disprove” this by attempting to maintain a lifestyle similar to life before kids. Parents soon learn to celebrate the fact that they will not get their old lives back. Life changes when children join the family, and while some things are lost, many others are gained.

A proactive approach to balance can help parents avoid crisis situations where they feel burned out and exhausted. Try the following tips from birth onward to keep everyone happy and healthy:

- **Set realistic goals.** Evaluate balance over a full day or week, not every single moment. Instead of wanting to be “the best” parent who does everything right, choose to be a “very good” parent who sometimes makes mistakes and learns from them. Parents have to learn “on the job” and should give themselves a break; parenting is hard work!

- **Put people before things.** When feeling overwhelmed by household duties, parents can take a little time to re-examine and re-assign chores in a more balanced way. Changing expectations around them may help also. “If there are dishes in your sink, but you had a great day with your kids—you’re doing OK!”

- **Don’t be afraid to say “no.”** Unfortunately, some people perceive at-home parents as “not working.” Don’t be afraid to say no when asked for a favor that would compromise individual and/or family needs. Ask these questions before committing to any new activity: Why do I want to do this? How will it affect our family life? Is it worth it?

- **Turn “unpleasant” parental duties into enjoyable ones.** For example, changing diapers can be enjoyable because parents get to look into the adoring eyes of the little person who loves them more than anyone else in the whole world. Sing songs or whistle or hum while performing less savory duties!

- **Be creative in finding ways to spend couples time.** Find ways to be together without compromising the needs of the infant. Try changing things around a bit. Have a candlelit dinner or a picnic in the living room. Something so simple can be fun and can help couples reconnect. Take a walk together wearing baby in a sling or venture further abroad. Many babies can sleep through an entire dinner out in a restaurant.

- **Take time for yourself.** Each parent should try to find some time each day to do something they enjoy or that helps them relax. It is not always easy to do, but taking this time while the other parent enjoys some one-on-one time with the baby will help everyone involved. A parent who doesn’t have a partner to provide some break time might arrange for a close friend, relative, or neighbor to come over at a certain time each day (or every few days) to provide support. If possible, use this time to read, walk, meditate, take a long bath or do something else that helps you unwind.

- **Use a “mother’s helper.”** Have someone that the child knows well come over to play and entertain baby while the parents have some quiet time together somewhere else in the house. This allows parents to focus on their relationship while keeping baby close by. Babies, especially newborns, are more content when they have access to their mothers.
The Eight Principles of AP

- **Eat healthy foods.** Healthful eating is important to keep parents healthy and balanced. Prepare ahead to have good meals. Make large batches of food on the weekends and freeze the extras for use during the week. A soft carrier allows baby to be with parents during food preparation and meals, however, safety precautions should be used when working near a hot stove.

- **Regular exercise** also helps parents stay in balance. Include baby in your exercise routine. Walks and outings, yoga exercises with baby, and other light activity can all be done with baby along.

- **Take naps when baby sleeps during the day.** Many people find they actually sleep better at night when they have napped or rested during the day.

- **Take care of yourself.** Get regular physicals and attend to self-care. Consider whether a physical problem could be contributing to feeling out of balance. For example, insomnia or low blood sugar can lead to feelings of fatigue and may prevent parents from achieving balance.

- **Avoid over-scheduling.** As a matter of fact, with a newborn it may be wise not to schedule anything at all!

- **Look for ways to make routine tasks easier.** For instance, baby’s diaper and/or clothes need to be changed several times a day, so choose baby clothing that is easy to put on and take off and have changing stations and extra clothing in the most-used areas of the house (and in the diaper bag).

- **Get out of the house.** Breastfeeding makes it easier to get out of the house for couples time, exercise, or errands since the baby’s food is always packaged and ready to go. Many states have laws protecting a mother’s right to breastfeed her child in public. Parents should be informed about the laws in their state so that they can rest assured that mother and baby can enjoy breastfeeding while out and about.

- **Follow your heart and listen to your baby.**

**Tips For Supporting New Mothers**

A new mother can become so involved in the care of her infant that she doesn’t recognize her own needs until she is in emotional or physical trouble. Mothers need frequent rest, fluids, and food just as infants do. A mother’s partner or support person can best help the new mother by:

- Being patient and sensitive to the needs of the new mother.
- Saying something appreciative about each other every day: “You are such a loving mother and wife/partner.” “Our baby adores you, and so do I.” “I appreciate all you are doing for our family.”
- Be grateful. Give the new mother the benefit of the doubt and treat her as an ally. Imagine what it would be like to parent solo!
- Seek to become a more empathic listener. Read Non-Violent Communication by Marshall B. Rosenberg and Arun Gandhi or Giving the Love that Heals by Harville Hendrix, PhD for tips on how to achieve this.

**Finding Balance and the Older Child**

As babies grow into toddlerhood and beyond they bring a new set of challenges. The following tips will help the family maintain balance with an older child:

- Bring a friend or mother’s helper along to entertain an older baby/toddler while mom enjoys an activity. Baby will be comforted by his mother’s close proximity, and mother will feel more relaxed knowing baby is nearby and not feeling stressed.
- Don’t overdo extracurricular activities. Allow the child some free time instead of scheduling every minute of the child’s day. Children love to have time to hang around the house, read, have their friends over, talk, play games, or be creative.
- Remember to spend time together, getting to know one another, and just being together. Spend time talking
with each other about each family member’s personal interests; this helps family members relate and improves communication. Develop family traditions together.

• Individual children need individual time with one or both parents. Parents should make a ‘date’ on a regular basis with each of their children for special time together.

• Create special family nights, like ‘game night,’ ‘movie night,’ or ‘music night.’ Most young children look forward to special times like these.

• Parents need to nurture themselves and their relationship. As children get older and develop trusting relationships with friends and family outside of the immediate family, parents can find more opportunities to have time alone together. Parents can also develop their own hobbies, interests, or do volunteer work they may have put ‘on hold’ when their children were younger. Set an example for the children and include them when possible.

Dealing with Parent “Burn-Out”

When families get out of balance, parents can feel “burned out” and “touched out” by the demands of parenting. Recognize the symptoms of burn-out. Burn-out is a physical, emotional, and mental response to high levels of stress. Parents may feel relentlessly fatigued, strained, and physically, emotionally, and mentally exhausted. They may also feel overworked, under-appreciated, angry, resentful, powerless, hopeless, drained, frustrated, detached, antisocial, unsatisfied, resentful, like a failure, indifferent, and unmotivated. Parents who feel their emotions are taking over should get help immediately!

Regain balance and heal burn-out by trying the following tips:

- Make regaining balance a priority TODAY. It’s easy to forget everything except the needs of the child, but what a child needs most of all is healthy, balanced parents. Parents should not feel guilty about taking some time for themselves to regain balance. Parents can take time for themselves while remaining sensitive to the needs of their children.

- Cultivate friendships with other parents who practice Attachment Parenting. Better yet, join an API support group. Parents of older children can share ideas and tips, while parents of similarly aged children can empathize.

- Make time to prioritize the family’s needs and don't be afraid to simplify and let unnecessary things go. A spotless house doesn’t do any good if the people who live in it are unhappy, out of touch, and out of balance.

- Every so often, take several deep breaths and slowly release them. Use yoga, meditation, visualization, or other techniques to regain calm and let go of stressful feelings.

- Professional counseling can be beneficial in helping families regain balance and in linking them to resources or other services in the community.

- When all else fails, remember those words of wisdom, “this too shall pass.” Remember that soon enough our children will be grown, and our houses will look like those in a magazine…remember these words from the late columnist, Erma Bombeck:

  **If I Had My Life To Live Over**

  If I had my life to live over, I would have talked less and listened more.
  I would have invited friends over to dinner even if the carpet was stained and the sofa faded.
  I would have eaten the popcorn in the ‘good’ living room and worried much less about the dirt when someone wanted to light a fire in the fireplace.
  I would have taken the time to listen to my grandfather ramble about his youth.
I would never have insisted the car windows be rolled up on a summer day because my hair had just been teased and sprayed.

I would have burned the pink candle sculpted like a rose before it melted in storage.

I would have sat on the lawn with my children and not worried about grass stains.

I would have cried and laughed less while watching television—and more while watching life.

I would have shared more of the responsibility carried by my husband.

I would have gone to bed when I was sick instead of pretending the earth would go into a holding pattern if I weren’t there for the day.

I would never have bought anything just because it was practical, wouldn’t show soil or was guaranteed to last a lifetime.

Instead of wishing away nine months of pregnancy, I’d have cherished every moment and realized that the wonderment growing inside me was the only chance in life to assist God in a miracle.

When my kids kissed me impetuously, I would never have said, “Later. Now go get washed up for dinner.”

There would have been more “I love you’s”.. More “I'm sorry’s” ...

But mostly, given another shot at life, I would seize every minute... look at it and really see it...live it...and never give it back.
An Important Reminder

As a reminder, research shows that all eight of the principles described in *The Eight Principles of Attachment Parenting* are critically important when raising securely attached children. One Principle should not be pursued at the expense of another, and the Principle of *Strive for Balance in Personal and Family Life* cannot be ignored.

Sometimes parents find themselves unable to meet their child’s need for one or more of these principles because of a negative experience from their past. For example, many parents who were spanked as children find that they are unable to consistently apply the principle, “Practice Positive Discipline.”

Successful AP requires parents to come to terms with their own histories when it has a major impact on their parenting attitudes and beliefs. If left unattended, these problems are likely to negatively impact the attachment process with their children. If one or both parents experienced abuse or neglect as a child, parents should consider seeking professional help to deal with these issues before their own child arrives.