



Parenting

Strengthening Attachment

From the beginning of life a child has an inbuilt strong need to be close and form attachments to others. Recognising these needs is obvious – the infant cry calls to attention all around to listen and respond.



When a child attaches closely with a caregiver there starts a journey that the two go on together. Young people need protection, nurturance and comfort, but the capacity of those around, and the reality of a complex world, mean that no child can ever have a 'perfect' beginning.

Experts in child development wisely state that the goal is to be 'good enough' in caregiving. This falls between 'perfect' and 'inadequate' - but fulfils the requirement to give the child a good start in life. In terms of priorities, attending to a young person's attachment needs for love, protection and care remains the fundamental goal of 'good enough' caregiving. These principles remain the same into adolescence and young adulthood.

There are a number of ways to be 'good enough' - here are some key principles:

- Establish child safety as a priority every day
- Spend enjoyable time together. For example infants need to be held close while older children may enjoy shared meals and games
- Show warmth and affection - especially at the start of the day and at separations and reunions
- Follow the child's lead to notice what they need from clues in their behaviour and feelings

- Talk with the child about their feelings and listen to the things they say
- Work on seeing things from the child's point of view
- Balance being warm and close with the child, and giving them space to explore the world. Keep a watchful eye over them, know what they are doing, but also let them make mistakes and learn from their experience as long as they are safe
- To feel safe, children need to know that their caregivers are in charge. It is normal for children to challenge their caregivers - this testing lets them know that it is right to trust their caregiver's authority. Give children responsibility for safe areas of their life that increase their independence and self-esteem.
- Notice the child's positive behaviours and comment on these each day

Being a caregiver is challenging, but being 'good enough' will help the child to successfully navigate their major developmental milestones. Having a good relationship can be a most rewarding experience in a person's life.

