



## **BSS TOP TIPS**

# **Attachment and Play**

**Activities to help you and your  
child connect**

**the  
attachment  
network**

# **The Importance of play**

Most young children won't say "I've heard the news about Covid-19 and it scares me ; can I talk to you about it?" Instead, they mostly say "Will you play with me?"

Play is where children show us the inner feelings and experiences that they can't or won't talk about. Children spontaneously use play to make themselves feel better. It is a child's natural way of recovering from their daily emotional ups and downs.

## **Connecting and re-connecting via play**

We all have connections to the people that are important to us, and if things happen that upset the balance, then that connection is temporarily lost - that horrible distant feeling we have all had after an argument with a loved one. We want to get things back to normal, to reconnect with them, but sometimes we don't know how to start.

Play is a way to get the ball rolling and meet the child halfway. Any play can be the doorway to reconnection, especially if you can get the giggles started. Young children love funny faces and voices and falling over. You can always pretend a toy is doing it if you feel too silly. Older children love jokes, fart gags, you doing the unexpected thing, "trying not to laugh" competitions. Watch their favourite programmes with them so you know the daft catch phrases and gags they like. Get them to try and make you laugh and that will give them an insight into what they find funny.

# Activities to Promote Attachment

- Outline your child's body, as well as your own on huge sheets of newspaper. Colour them in.
- Play with dolls to act out how parents always return after child goes to child care, babysitter, school, bed, etc.
- Draw cartoon panels of the day's routine, so that your child can see that Mum and Child always come back to the same home together. Anxiety and stress can interfere with auditory processing, so it is important to use something visual that can be held in the hand.
- Make lots of new memories and record them by taking photos of the two of you together eg silly face photos in a photo booth.
- Claim your child. Tell her she belongs to you. Give her a big hug and say "MINE!"

# Encouraging Eye Contact

- Play Peek-a boo. This develops the concept of object permanence (that even if you can't see something, it's still there). For kids who are still anxious about you leaving, repeat "Where's the Baby? Here's the Baby! Where's mum? Here's mum! Mum goes to work, Mum comes home!" to emphasize the message that Mum always comes back.
- Have baby pull a sticker off your nose - and put it back.
- MUSICAL NOSE GAME- Sing a song and let your child pinch your nose so you sound very silly. You stop singing if she breaks eye contact.
- MUSICAL SWING GAME - put child in a swing. Face her as you push. Stop singing if the child breaks eye contact.
- Encourage eye contact by singing a song, and stopping if she looks away.
- Fill your cheeks with air. Have child "pop" them.
- Take turns feeding each other. This works great with raisins, cheerios, and popcorn.

- Eskimo kisses - rub noses and stare into each others eyes.
- Play in front of a mirror. Make faces, paint Mum's face, trace each other's faces on the mirror with washable marker, finger paint with shaving cream. Let your child be your puppet and make her dance. Make dolls dance. Any kind of game that gets your child to relax and meet your eyes in the mirror, will likely get her relaxed enough to meet your eyes directly.
- Instead of using an actual mirror, take turns being each other's mirror. Sit face to face, and have your child imitate every facial movement you make, and vice versa. Then try it with your whole body, mirroring each other's movements.
- For an older child, try lipreading with each other. Even though you're not getting direct eye contact, you are looking at each other's faces.

# Games which Encourage Attachment

- Play hide and seek (also develops the idea of object permanence)
- Play catch or roll a ball back and forth. Throwing or batting a balloon may be easier than throwing a ball for little ones.
- A Memory game but with a more personal touch: Have your child look you over very carefully. Then leave the room and return after you've changed something about yourself. See if she can figure out what is different. It could be something really obvious for younger kids, like taking off a jumper, but for older kids you could get more challenging, like buttoning one more button on the jumper.
- Guess the Goodies: Put several small treats in a bag or cup. child closes their eyes. You pop a treat in their mouth and they try to guess what it is.
- Pillow ride: have child sit on big floor pillow and you drag them around the room.
- Smarties football: Use bendy straws and blow sweets across table to other persons goal. When you score a goal, the opponent feeds you the sweets.

- Marshmallow fight: Each person uses a pillow as a shield. Sit on the floor and throw marshmallows at each other. Gets wild and crazy and is a lot of fun. Can do the same with crumpled paper.
- Jumping across pillows to arms: set up pillow islands in a pattern across floor. Child starts at one end, you are at the other. Child starts when you direct them to as noted above. Child jumps across the islands and into your arms.
- Doughnut Dare: You hold a doughnut on your finger through the hole and the child sees how many bites they can take before it falls off.
- Slippy hands: Put lotion or hand cream on your hands and pretend to hold on tight to each others' hands and then Whoops, slip off backwards with lots of exaggeration and laughing.

## Follow up ideas

- These activities have been drawn together from a large number of the attachment websites out there plus a book by Lawrence Cohen called Playful Parenting.. A lot of the ideas are based on Theraplay .
- Once you start trying these activities, I am sure you will think of load of your own too.
- You may find the ideas in this booklet could help with sibling relationships too.
- Your child's school may be interested to hear what has worked well, ,as some of the games would be useful for developing relationships in school.
- For further information or support please contact Heather Newton at the Behaviour Support Service  
Tel 0161 437 4956 Option 2  
heather.newton@stockport.gov.uk