

The Critical Needs of Children

By Jennifer Scoby

Attachment parenting helps us to be connected with and to deeply know our children. When we are so in tune, it's easier to see which of their basic needs to focus on, thereby helping our children to feel and act their best and bringing out their full potential. As Dr. William Sears says, "A child who feels right acts right and is a joy to parent."

Our children have needs that are every bit as complex as our own. Children's needs, though, are critical to their development in many ways. Michael Mason, founding member of the CSPCC (Canadian Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children) states, "*For the first time in history, we have certain knowledge of the means whereby the capacity for trust, empathy and affection can be shattered in the first three years of life*". We as parents carry the awesome responsibility and joy of ensuring that the needs of our children are fulfilled.

The following is a list of critical needs that was compiled at an Attachment Parenting Symposium at Harvard University in 2000...

Attachment Parenting is a style of parenting that develops an infant or child's need for trust, empathy, and affection in order to create a secure, peaceful, and enduring relationship. This style requires a consistent, loving, and responsive caregiver, ideally a parent, especially during the critical first three to five years of life. The Critical Needs of Children We recognize that it can help parents to be responsive to their child's needs if they know what those needs are. The following list of needs were developed at the Attachment Parenting Symposium at Harvard Medical School in July, 2000:

1. Attunement - being in tune with baby and developing loving connections allows parents to respond in developmentally appropriate ways, thereby meeting their emotional needs.

2. Touch and holding - close physical contact through skin-to-skin holding, touch or massage, baby carrying or wearing soft baby carriers.

3. Physical needs must be met - including good nutrition, physical care, warmth, safety, breastfeeding or if bottle-feeding the use of breastfeeding-like behaviors (such as holding during feedings, eye contact etc.).

4. Continuity of care/predictability in environment - having a consistent, responsive, caring primary caregiver to help facilitate bonding and attachment.

5. Comforting - responding empathically to baby, soothing baby when he or she is upset.

6. Adoration - it is important for baby to know unconditional love, to feel adored and accepted; this provides secure emotional base.

7. Protection - providing baby with a safe physical environment both within the home without, also includes providing a safe emotional environment where emotions can be expressed and trust developed.

8. Sensory stimulation - the growing brain needs input; much of this need can be met, naturally, through the motion, sight, and sound of being kept physically close and carried by mother.

9. Positive daily interactions - parents should provide positive verbal and physical responses, communicate with and respond to the child.

10. Opportunities for exploration and mastery - babies need flexibility in their home environment and to be provided opportunities to be able to safely explore and have some control in order to develop skills and confidence.

11. Limits and boundaries - taught in accordance with the child's developmental level to develop and enhance safety, social skills, respect and empathy for other, as they get older.

12. Modeling - parents mirror positive behavior back to child; since children learn from parents' and others' behavior and want to be like parents, parents must be examples of the type of behavior and demonstrate values that they want their child to acquire; Joseph Chilton Pierce suggests parents "become the kind of person you want your child to be".