

WONDERS & WORRIES

What Parents Should Know About the Child-Parent Relationship



Wonders & Worries

Professional support for children through a parent's illness or injury.

We will, together.



The child-parent relationship (CPR) is dynamic and ever-evolving. This relationship is foundational for children as they are greatly influenced by you and the bond that is created. Over time, you have continually supported your child and have grown together, and through these shared experiences have a rhythm unlike others. Sturdy relationships can serve as the base a child needs to adequately adjust and cope during challenging life experiences. As attachment researcher John Bowlby states, “Life is best organized as a series of daring ventures from a secure base.”

Creating and Sustaining Relationship:

Creating and sustaining relationships helps children:

- Have a sense of safety and security (e.g., my relationships provide me with boundaries, expectations, and routine). With this sense of safety, children are also able to learn

that relationships are not perfect, although with time and effort, they can be repaired (versus, my friend and I had a fight and we won't ever be friends again). Modeling how to repair after an argument or misunderstanding is important – connect and reflect together about how it could be handled the next time.

- Form identity (e.g., I am part of a loving family – I am loving)
- Develop empathy and pro-social behavior (e.g., understanding the golden rule – I am treated well within my relationships, which is teaching me how others would want to be treated)
- Promotes coping and adjustment (e.g., I have a support system that I can rely on when needed)

Questions to Consider:

Questions to consider when thinking about the relationship you have with your child:

- In what ways are we alike and in what ways are we different? Creating an awareness for differences is helpful for relationship building.
- What do I enjoy and value most about my child and how he or she acts? Keeping in mind what you admire about your child can help foster engagement and connection.
- What do I dislike about how my child acts? Keeping in mind characteristics or behaviors that you have a harder time accepting brings an awareness that helps with managing potential situations that could cause more friction.
- When we spend time together, what is that like? Are we able to connect throughout the activity? Am I able to be present during this time?
- What is my child interested in? How can I build on their interests to create opportunities for connection?

CHILD-CENTERED ACTIVITIES:

Child-centered activities are those where a child leads and guides playful engagement as opposed to parents leading and directing a play activity. Childcentered activities between children and parents are so important because:

- Parents are the most important people in a child's life. This focused time together supports bonding and continued attachment (e.g., shows your child: I see you. I hear you. I understand. I care.)
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- Play and self-expressive activities (verbal and non-verbal) are strategies for children to communicate.
- Parents can compare play behaviors with daily life. For example, Johnny is aggressively knocking down blocks during play time; I wonder if this may be related to feelings associated with his dad’s unexpected hospitalization.
- The skills that children develop during focused activity time with a parent can be applied to life outside of the activity time. For example, “Johnny, I see that you are feeling mad. What are some ways to handle being mad?”
- Additionally, can help to:
 - Maintain a sense of normalcy (especially during periods of change)
 - Create opportunities for control and confidence building (Parent: “It looks like you really know what you are doing with those Legos – might you be able to show me how that works?”), and problem solving (empowerment)

As you continue to build and strengthen the relationship you have with your child, enjoy being present, curious, and staying attuned to their feelings. Keep activities child-led to create continued opportunities for control, confidence building, and to serve as an outlet for fun and self-expression. Through time together and joint attention, the supportive base your child has will continue to grow, as will their coping abilities during challenging situations.

To connect with a child life specialist to discuss this topic further, contact the Wonders & Worries helpline at 1-844-WE-WONDER or helpline@wondersandworries.org.



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