



Wellbeing Support: Attachment, Play and Building Bonds



Children (and adults!) behave in a way which mirrors how they feel about themselves. For example, children who feel negative about themselves are more likely to exhibit negative behaviours. Playing together helps children feel good about themselves, so they can behave that way more.

When children feel like their emotions and feelings are understood, it helps your relationship feel closer and more rewarding for you both.

With positive, 'feel good' family relationships and strong attachments, children can:

- feel secure and loved, which helps their brains develop
- overcome difficulties with their learning and behaviour better
- solve problems and resolve conflict with you better
- develop the skills they need to build healthy relationships of their own
- feel less anxious and do better in their life

Time playing together is really important and can help with children feeling understood.

Time playing together where the child is the centre of their parent/s' universe helps children know they are accepted, important and then they don't need to seek out attention in more damaging or tiring ways. They may play out their tensions, worries and burdens in play



releasing their anxiety or worries. The child then feels better about themselves and will be able to be more independent and responsible for themselves.

Here are some helpful strategies to build bonds with your child through play and empathy:

- Spend at least 5-10 minutes with each of your children individually every day. You can use this time to play, talk, offer empathy or just be together. Asking your child what they would like to do together is helpful.
- When responding to children saying how they feel, try to start your sentences with 'You...'. For example:
 - 'You must have been really excited about that!'
 - 'You seem worried about that, that must be making you feel very scared'
 - 'You look happy about that, I would feel happy and proud too!' (It doesn't matter if you get it wrong! Children appreciate their loved ones trying to understand them very much.)
- You don't always need to fix what your child is feeling. Telling children to 'stop worrying' or changing the direction of your child's play to make a story all work out well in the end can make them feel silly and weak for worrying, when often they can't help it. Instead we give our child a cuddle and tell them that it's normal to worry, and that you'd feel the same if you were their age. This will usually calm them down enough to then have a conversation and ease their worries.
- Have a set play time just you and your child for 20-30 minutes, at least once a week. Playing together develops understanding and helps you feel really together. Toys are like words for children and play is their language.
- For play time, have set rules. For example, look after each other, look after the toys, look after the space.
- Make sure there are no rules for playing in a certain way or judgements about things being right or wrong.

A helpful journal that children often enjoy is the ['Just Between Us' journal for mothers and daughters](#) and there is one for [mothers and sons](#) as well. There are similar copies for different relationships online but these ones really support the building of relationships as children begin to get older.