

### **When does the Attachment Relationship Between the Baby and her family Start?**

**Attachment is so important** because this relationship supports the baby/toddler to develop the ability to regulate her emotions, learn strategies for coping with stress and forms the pattern for being in relationships for the rest of her life. It dramatically affects the child's ability to learn and pay attention. It also is vitally important to the child's physical health as attachment plays a large role in regulating the heart, neuroendocrine and immune systems. From the last trimester of pregnancy until about 8 months the infant's brain is mainly operating in delta and theta waves, which is the brain state where deep imprinting occurs.

It is as if the baby is "downloading" directly into the emotional centers of her brain state all that is happening to her, all that she sees and hears around her. These experiences form her view of herself and of life.

(Note: this booklet will use the feminine for brevity to avoid saying he/she; his/her).

### **Watching for and Respecting Activation and Settling Cycles**

All babies and young children naturally have a cycle where they will be active and then settle, be active and then settle. But their environment can interfere with their natural cycle as well as support it. Sometimes this begins with the labor being induced and /or augmented with pitocin. Infants may have a strong experience of the labor being too fast, too abrupt and intense, just as the Mom may have such an experience. This can affect the confusing natural rhythmic responses with their Mother, taking longer for them to settle. Sometimes Mom has so much going on that she rarely settles herself during the day. Sometimes, especially if there are other young children in the house, everything is moving fast and there are many different rhythms for the baby to adjust to.

It is important for the parents to provide periods of activity and periods of quiet time and rest for their young children. Parents need to notice when a young one is getting tired or restless and support that child to go into settling. This helps the child to feel her own natural rhythm and will greatly assist her in regulating her emotions. Families going into active play together and then settling into quiet time together strengthens attachment, because they are sharing their natural rhythms in a cooperative dance. The parents having space to go into rest periods at times during the day may be one of the BIG keys to effective attachment parenting. Without this it is impossible for any adult to stay present with their child.

**An example would be to build in a routine group pause, where the family members would be relaxing together for a short time after coming home for the day. Everyone could fall down on the couch or the floor for a few minutes before making dinner or starting other activities.**

The newly conceived baby inside her mother is inseparable from her mother's experience and is, in fact, experiencing everything the mother is experiencing. So what her mother is experiencing during the pregnancy is automatically passing on to the baby and is already teaching the baby about questions like: Am I lovable? Am I safe? Will my mother be able to protect me? Will my mother be there to meet my needs? How the baby's body, nervous system and mind develops during the pregnancy is directly related to what her mother is experiencing in her life.

While developing in utero the baby is building her body in response to her experiences. She is building a body suitable to the conditions of the outside environment she is perceiving through her mother. She is learning her mother's way of coping with stress. Does she light up a cigarette or have a drink? Does she take rest, and readjust her pace or workload? The unborn baby is learning her mother's eating and sleeping habits, her rhythms and movement patterns, what kind of music she likes...everything about her. She is getting to know about who will take care of her when she is born and what to expect after birth. By 6-7 months of pregnancy the unborn baby responds with precise muscular movement patterns to each unit of sound in her mother's speech when she is awake. They are doing a dance with each other constantly.

If the baby's mom is living a high stress life, due to depression, violence, overwork or any other cause then the high level of stress hormones in Mom result in the baby developing her own body geared to cope with high stress. The fetal muscles, cells and mechanisms for flight or fight will be well developed. This means that the blood supply, nerve supply and number of cells in the internal organs will be less than if Mom is in a low stress state. The child may be more susceptible to illnesses such as heart disease, diabetes, and immune system diseases later in life (Nathanielsz, 1999). At birth the baby already has a sense of the world as safe or hostile due to how the mother felt or experienced her world prenatally, be that high job stress, fighting with the baby's father, money issues, war or whatever the situation was. After birth this sense continues to be built on or is repatterned depending on the baby's experience.

By one year of age the baby will have this basic sense of trust or fear well established. If the trust in her parent hasn't happened she will already be developing strategies to protect her from further pain. By 18 months, her core view of the world, and herself and the strategies for being in the world are hard wired into the emotional brain, and will regulate emotional behavior lifelong. This does not mean that change is not possible after this time, but it is more difficult and takes focused work by both parent and child as it is now a case of repatterning a well established core way of being.