



# ACT

## Participant Resource Notebook

*Diversity,  
Healing &  
the Family*

**Practice  
Tools**

## PARENTING TECHNIQUES TO INCREASE FAMILY ATTACHMENT

*Developed by Deborah N. Silverstein, L.C.S.W.*

*Note: All of these techniques involve repeated episodes of highly focused attention between adult and child and often involve physical contact. Adults are involved in trying to decode their child's behaviors, identifying the child's developmental needs and underlying emotions. The goal is to create "a transforming attuned relationship that involves the following fundamental elements: contingent, collaborative communication; psychobiological state attunement; mutually shared interactions that involve the amplification of positive affective states and the reduction of negative ones; reflection on mental states; and the ensuing development of mental models of security that enable emotional modulation and positive expectancies for future interactions" (Siegel, 2003, p. 118).*

### ATTACHMENT-FACILTATING BEHAVIORS: HOLDING/TOUCH

#### \* Rocking/playing baby

Holding for pleasure and holding for relaxation, including gentle touching, close eye contact, singing, caressing, feeding, nursery games, "raspberries" on neck and belly, counting fingers and toes, patty cake, "I'm gonna getcha," holding child up on parent's feet, play horsey, bouncing child

- Use of the plural pronouns (we, us) and frequent use of the child's name
- Feeding with a bottle or spoon feeding the child
- Initiating close physical contact by wearing short sleeves and soft fabrics—avoiding buttons and buckles
- Taking showers and baths together (if developmentally appropriate), swimming together
- Carrying smaller children in "snugglies"
- Stroking, touching, and sitting close during feeding times
- Wrestling as long as the child does not feel victimized
- Tickling
- Massaging/applying lotion
- Using "lap time," frequently throughout the day 3–5 minutes with a kitchen timer

### PLAYING

(It is important the play is *reciprocal* in nature.)

- Playing with dolls
- Tossing a ball
- Swinging
- Playing board games and taking turns
- Playing hide and seek or peek-a-boo
- Making faces (linking faces with feelings)
- Imitating play (adult following child's lead in play)
- Feeding each other (for example, M&Ms)
- Using sound (singing rounds, movement, drumming)
- Using "surprise" behaviors which gently intrude on child (kissing, blowing in child's face, hugging unexpectedly)



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- Staring contests to promote prolonged eye contact
- Screaming matches
- Searching for the magic button on child—when the parents find, children stick out their tongue
- Pretending to turn the child into a gingerbread figure by mixing ingredients (rubbing), rolling out dough, cutting the shape (tracing around body), decorating, baking and eating up with kisses
- Pretending child’s back is race track and parent’s thumbs are cars
- Passing a touch around a circle, or handshake, or pat on the back
- Rocking a child wrapped in a blanket while singing
- Performing magic trick with partners, child and adult
- Playing with puppets, doll house figures and animals
- Painting faces
- Role playing or family charades (role playing another family member)
- Drawing—a family portrait or family collage

### FEELINGS EDUCATION

- Making faces, sounds, music, art projects about specific feelings
- Discussing feelings of others in magazine faces, on television or in videos
- Learning to label feelings and validating them, giving permission for child to have feelings
- Modeling management of distress states—remaining calm and relaxed
- Keeping daily log of closeness and tracking with any variables parent wants to plug in
- Practicing moving bodies (coming closer, going away, hiding and inquiring “when do you feel closest?”)
- Using figures such as doll house figures to play out attachment issues—doll comes close, moves away, “How does she feel?” “Why does she come close?” and “What makes her move back?”
- Storytelling together (parents and children telling stories which include themes of attachment and “teaching” children that attachment is safe and desirable)
- Planning together ways to increase feelings of closeness

### HEIGHTENING OPPORTUNITIES TO NURTURE

- Engaging in activities which involve soothing, calming, quieting, reassuring
- Sitting child between parents at dinner and touching child while eating
- Nursing sick children and encouraging children to cry and accept comfort  
Physical complaints are common in the grief process and for child with attachment difficulties parents must respond, respond, respond. This gives increased opportunities for emotional and physical nurturing. Use band-aids, special foods and rocking; do not minimize child’s complaints by comments such as “you’re fine” and “don’t be such a baby”
- Sleeping arrangements (consider child sleeping with or near parents for a time and use bedtime rituals to heighten attachment)



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- Putting snacks next to children in a “love box” in case they awaken during night
- Having “pajama day” when the family stays home, goofs off, and builds relationships

### CLARIFYING LIFE EVENTS

- Using life books or life maps (honors previous attachments and helps child and family visually understand child’s history)
- Visiting (in relation to foster care, open adoption and visits with other significant figures from child’s past) and documenting child’s history through video / audio / photography  
All significant figures should be together if possible. This makes it clear to the child that there are no choices or loyalty conflicts necessary. Pictures of everyone surrounding the child give a clear, non-verbal message to the child.

### USING ACTIVITIES WHICH HIGHLIGHT & PROMOTE IDENTIFICATION WITH FAMILY

- Using developmental re-parenting. Adjust parenting style to developmental age or needs of child, which “fills the child up” and encourages re-engagement of natural incentives toward maturity
- Dressing alike—similar color t-shirts, for example.
- Observing family rituals and traditions (bedtime, birthdays, placement day, etc.)

### DISCIPLINING (One of the primary techniques)

- Disciplining without distance  
Do not “reward” misbehavior with parental distance as this may reinforce attachment issues
- Using techniques that increase attachment, such as “time-in,” “house arrest,” chores done together, physical activity, etc.
- Avoiding letting the child get out of control  
Behavior must be limited but do not reinforce old maladaptive attachment behaviors; parents must not struggle to get control
- Working as a team; parents and extended family members and other caregivers must work together
- Setting firm consistent boundaries from the beginning
- Making punishments brief, relevant, and immediate—attachment-based discipline
- Monitoring television and movies to avoid aggressive content

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#### References

Siegel, D.J., & Hartzell, M. (2003). *Parenting from the inside out*. New York, NY: Putnam.

*Deborah N. Silverstein, L.C.S.W., is former Vice President, Kinship Center, in Santa Ana, California. She is an adoptive parent, therapist, author, lecturer, and co-developer of the ACT curriculum.*