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PO Box 5649, Lambton Quay, Wellington 6145



Secure Attachment for Children - our common goal



By Eva Scherer

Sixty years have passed since scientist Harry Harlow showed that young mammals need close body contact with parents, and that it has a value even more important than that of food and shelter. Children can not develop properly without touch.

During these years we have experienced large shifts to our lifestyles and the manner of raising our children. The role of parents has changed and now involves more professionals and new terms such as "primary caregiver" that emphasises the role of child care is no longer reserved for the mother only.

As an example take a closer look at a very successful approach to parenting, the Leksand model.

Starting in the Scandinavian countries, but now expanding to include the UK and other European countries, including Russia, it provides a unified approach to equip parents with the education needed for the task of raising children. When the midwife first meets the future parents,

she welcomes them into a parent group. From there, pre natal education involves:

- Midwife
- Psychologist
- Preschool teacher
- Family counsellor
- Social worker
- Daddy coach
- Nurses from a child healthcare unit
- Family therapist
- Social benefit advisor

All these professionals educate future parents in how to nurture their child. One year later post natal classes emphasise the role of pre-schools.

This model counterparts with the New Zealand Parents Centre and other emerging community hubs. To quote from the Ministry of Education "Over the past century, early childhood care and education services in New Zealand have been established to meet the particular needs of children, parents, and communities, as well as those of society as a whole. Today early childhood services are jointly involved with families in the socialisation, care, and education of children."

It is with these thoughts in mind that the Child Connection Trust offers a programme for early education centres to learn massage therapy - our particular expertise is teaching Secure Attachment building skills.

In the "Tiny Tots" Right Brain Learning/ sensory stimulation programme developed especially for preschoolers we put equal attention on 3 elements:

- 1) Vigorous touch games that children play between themselves
- 2) Back massage that caregivers deliver to children during nap time
- 3) Homework for parents - Bond/Secure Attachment building games to be practiced with children at home.

Let's look closer at these 3 elements

Vigorous touch games that children play between themselves

The car wash game is a favourite of toddlers. Two children play the role of brushes. They are on their knees each side of the "driveway". The queue of toddlers are passing slowly between "brushes", experiencing washing/vigorous massaging



which starts from the head through to the deck/shoulders and front wheels/arms and finishing on the legs and feet/back wheels. Each child wants to stay longer, but the rules are an equal time slot for each "car". When toddlers are familiar with the game they tell their preferences to the "brushes". Some want longer head "washes", some arms, some legs. Their awareness of their body is developing.

Another popular game is "shop with musical instruments". The instruments can be guitar or piano. Each time the child chooses which instrument they want to be. Guitar is very "ticklish", but children love it, sometime making it a competition as to who will stay the longest. Piano – back massage develops creativity and fun. This game is performed by a teacher. The child lies on the teacher's knees, while different songs are played on the toddlers back.

Back massage that caregivers deliver to children during nap time

According to a long term study in 2008 on 110 toddlers by Uppsala University in Sweden, "Daily touching by massage lasting 5-10 minutes could be an easy and inexpensive way to decrease aggression among preschool children".

We value this nap time massage as an important way to build secure attachment. Just opening a jar with nice smelling massage wax makes children slow down and be ready for a nap. After receiving the acceptance of each child, a 5 to 7 minute massage session by a teacher has a calming down effect. It is of course not a proper back massage. During the "Tiny Tots" course, early childhood education teachers are shown different techniques. Before applying it to children the teachers themselves feel the differences between the strokes on their own bodies, building confidence of being touched and giving touch.

In nap time, apart from touch itself, an additional sensory stimulator is used – smell. Teachers use organic Tui Balm on the hands of the child so that the child can breathe a nice smell. We use two fragrances. "Pacific Night" balm with Jasmine, Sandalwood and Neroli and "Mountain Forrest" balm with Cedarwood and Cypress fragrances.

Secure attachment in the home

Today's parents are much busier than they used to be in the past. After dealing with the routine matters of family life such as meals and planning tasks for the next day, parents are quite happy to put children to bed and relax for a while. They can miss the precious "together time" of listening to the child and giving him loving attention when attachment and bonding are created. This opportunity is given to humans only once in a lifetime - during first 3 years of a child's life. Many parents are simply not aware of this. A lack of attachment can lead to teenage pregnancy, suicide, alcohol or drug addiction.

Teachers can tell if children are getting quality time at home and if parents are practicing attachment games with their children. Results are visible through the child's behavior almost immediately: children are less aggressive, happier and more involved.

Many parents are familiar with baby massage, but Child Connection techniques are different. Our focus is on playing with children. Our games engage child and parent, or child and child, or child and teacher. They all are performed with close physical contact and tell a story which engage imagination and humour.

During our 3 hours "Tiny Tots" course we present academic and scientific evidence on which the importance of touch for child development is based. Give early childhood education teachers the skills and tools to be used in the daily routines of the centre, as well as materials for educating parents.

If today's parents have not learned how to create attachment and bonding skills they will not be able to pass them to their children. This is why parents' education is so important. Early learning centres as Parental Schools – why not? All ways and resources to provide children with secure attachment should be taken for consideration. These open up another avenue for children to be loved and nurtured, which benefits not only children, but all of society.

To find out more about "Tiny Tots" programme for early childhood centres, please visit:
<http://childconnection.org.nz/tiny-tots/>

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- Sense of Smell Institute <http://www.senseofsmell.org/>

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SAUNDERS
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128 Vivian Street, P O Box 430 New Plymouth

06 759 7430

info@saundersarchitects.co.nz