

# TINY BITS (BETTER INFORMED TOGETHER) FOR FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

DAUPHIN COUNTY MH/A/DP  
OCTOBER 2023 TINY BIT

## Infant and Toddler Development The Importance of Attachment and Bonding

You may have heard about the developmental importance of ‘the first thousand days’ of a child’s life.

A growing body of evidence supports this thinking – that experiences in-utero, through infancy (0–12 months) and into toddlerhood (1–3 years) can have lifelong impacts, both positive and negative, for physical and mental health, literacy, and socio-economic outcomes. These early years are vital in shaping a child’s long-term social and emotional wellbeing.

Attachment and bonding are both ways to describe the feelings between you and your baby, but attachment has a broader meaning than bonding. Attachment is about both you and your baby. It is about how you build a relationship over time that helps your baby to feel secure and loved, and ready to face the world. Bonding is all about you. It is about the surge of love and tenderness you feel for your baby. You may feel it when you are pregnant, perhaps when you see the first blurry image of your baby on a scan. Or you may feel it when you first hold your baby after giving birth, but it can take longer.

Beyond learning to communicate and control their bodies, the major developmental challenge for an infant is to form an attachment, with at least one reliable caregiver who can respond to their physical and emotional needs – a bonding experience that forms the foundation for their later social, emotional and cognitive development. This formative connection gives a young child a sense of understanding themselves and their influence on the people and spaces in their world, and of the ‘trustworthiness’ of others – an inner feeling that forms the basis for self-awareness, self-esteem, and emotional, social and cognitive development.

As an infant becomes a toddler, the basic sense of trust they have in their primary caregiver – the secure knowledge that someone will be there for them when needed – supports them to explore and learn beyond their primary attachment, and in the development of their sense of ‘self.’ It is this fundamental nurturing relationship between infant and caregiver – that the child’s wellbeing is the caregiver’s top priority – that sets children up for positive mental health later in life. **A few tips include:**

1. The bond between a mother and her child starts during the pregnancy period itself.
2. Spending quality time is part of showing your love. The more time and effort you put into this relationship, the stronger the bonding will be.
3. Encourage and motivate your child to build their confidence.
4. Listen Actively. Stop whatever you are doing at the time and listen to them.

Attachment and bonding go hand-in-hand, though. It follows that if you feel a strong bond with your baby, it will help your baby to develop a secure attachment to you too, as they grow.

Excerpts: [In focus: Infant and toddler mental health - Emerging Minds](#)  
[What is the difference between attachment and bonding?](#)

