



SESSION

2

Babies Matter: Bonding and attachment

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**BABIES
MATTER**

A KIDS MATTER PROGRAMME

Pre-Session planning list

To do	To buy	To prepare	Babies Matter resources
<i>Reminder text to parents</i>	<i>Refreshments</i>	<i>Doll / teddy bear</i>	<i>Facilitator's Booklet</i>
<i>Double check room is booked</i>	<i>Flowers</i>	<i>Kettle, mugs, water, spoons, plastic cups, plates</i>	<i>Guest Booklets</i>
<i>Collate toys / blankets for babies</i>		<i>Tablecloth, napkins</i>	<i>Group register</i>
<i>Sticky labels for names</i>		<i>Tissues</i>	<i>Postcards</i>
<i>Pray! Prompt others to pray for you</i>		<i>Supplies for baby changing facilities (nappies, wipes, nappy bags)</i>	<i>Pens</i>
		<i>Your example for the 'Balancing our time' activity</i>	

On the day:

- Set up chairs in a 'horseshoe' with blankets / cushions on the floor with baby toys in reach
- Check that baby changing facilities are stocked up and clean
- Prepare tea/coffee/food on a separate table
- Introduce yourself, and each other, give out name labels
- Offer a tea/coffee/water; make sure hot drinks are covered if using disposable cups
- Speak to a parent before the session about asking to model the activity on pg.6 if you feel it is appropriate

Remember: Smile, be positive, be ready to share your good and bad experiences of parenting babies of this age!

My goals in facilitating this session:

To highlight challenges and positive responses from Session 1
Parent/carer starts to understand that bonding and attachment with their baby comes from responding to, reassuring, and playing with their baby
Parent/carer becomes aware of how their baby communicates with them, and the importance of eliminating distractions such as screens, to help them tune into their baby
Parent/carer has thought about their own experiences of being parented (and those of their PT) and what they want to do the same / differently
Parent/carer has thought about how they balance their time and the importance of making time for 'ACE' activities

Review of Session 1

Ask the group what they found memorable or helpful from last week's session.

Last time we met, we talked about our parenting team, the changes we are experiencing and understanding the different stresses in our life.

Q: Have you had any chance to use your 'stress release tap' this last week?

Q: Who has had the opportunity to do something to look after their physical health? *Celebrate any successes and encourage anyone who is finding this hard.*



Over the next 6 weeks we will be covering:

Session 1 – Changes for me and us

Session 2 – Bonding and attachment

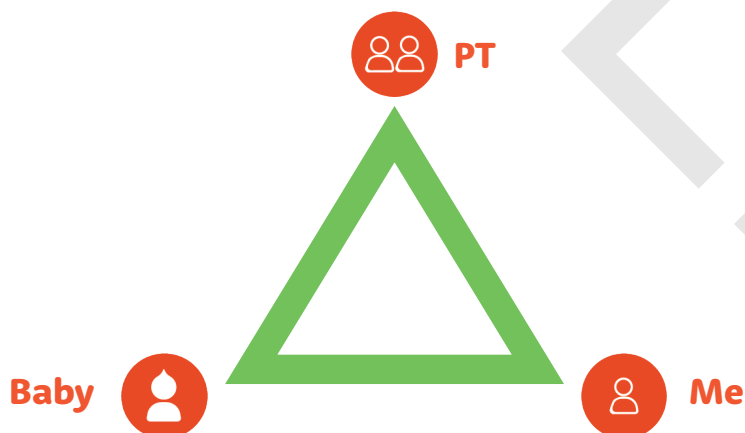
Session 3 – Helping baby to develop

Session 4 – Building strong relationships

Session 5 – Baby's amazing brain

Session 6 – Thinking back, looking forwards

Today we are going to spend time focusing on bonding with our baby. This is important for 'me' and 'baby' in our triangle, and when our 'PT' is strong, we can support each other in doing this.



We are now going to think about attachment and bonding - what it is, why it is important, how and when we do it. For some, this will be a positive topic, for others it might be something that is a struggle, but we can all learn from each other.



Bonding and Attachment – what, why, how, when?

Q: What do you think of when you hear the words ‘bonding’ and ‘attachment’?

What is ‘Bonding and Attachment’?

It’s the emotional connection between parents and baby - it’s the very beginning of our developing relationship with our child and their relationship with us.

We all have hopes for our babies’ futures, and there is a long time for those hopes to be realised as we deepen and develop our relationship with them. Attachment and bonding are the very beginning of that growing relationship with our child.

Activity: Seeing the world from baby’s perspective. *Gently introduce this as a way of helping us all to better understand the topic of attachment and bonding. Reassure parents that you will keep your eyes open if there are babies in the room.*

To help us understand what our role is in attachment, we’re going to imagine what it’s like for your baby when they need something. For 30 seconds, we’re going to close our eyes - everyone is going to do it at the same time - now imagine you’re hungry or tired, thirsty, or upset. But you can’t move to do anything about it, and you haven’t got any words or way of communicating this need.

After 30 seconds, encourage guests to write an answer to the question in the box below.

Q: How did that feel?

Our babies are in the same position and rely on us to tune into their needs and meet them. *Remind parents that when our baby feels hungry, tired, thirsty, or upset they don’t understand what this means and it’s a more intense feeling/need!*



When I had my eyes shut and could not communicate verbally, I felt

.....

As parents, we have an important role to play in helping our babies feel safe and know that their needs are going to be met by us. Responding to our babies’ needs in a loving, consistent way is how we build up a strong bond with them. By tuning into our baby’s emotions, this helps them learn to understand and manage their own thoughts and feelings.



Why is it important?

Q: What have you heard about why attachment is important?

Babies are born ready to connect with us; they want and need to know we are here to love them and look after them.

Here we are helping parents to think of the importance of staying connected to the needs of their baby. Be sensitive as this can be a heavy subject.

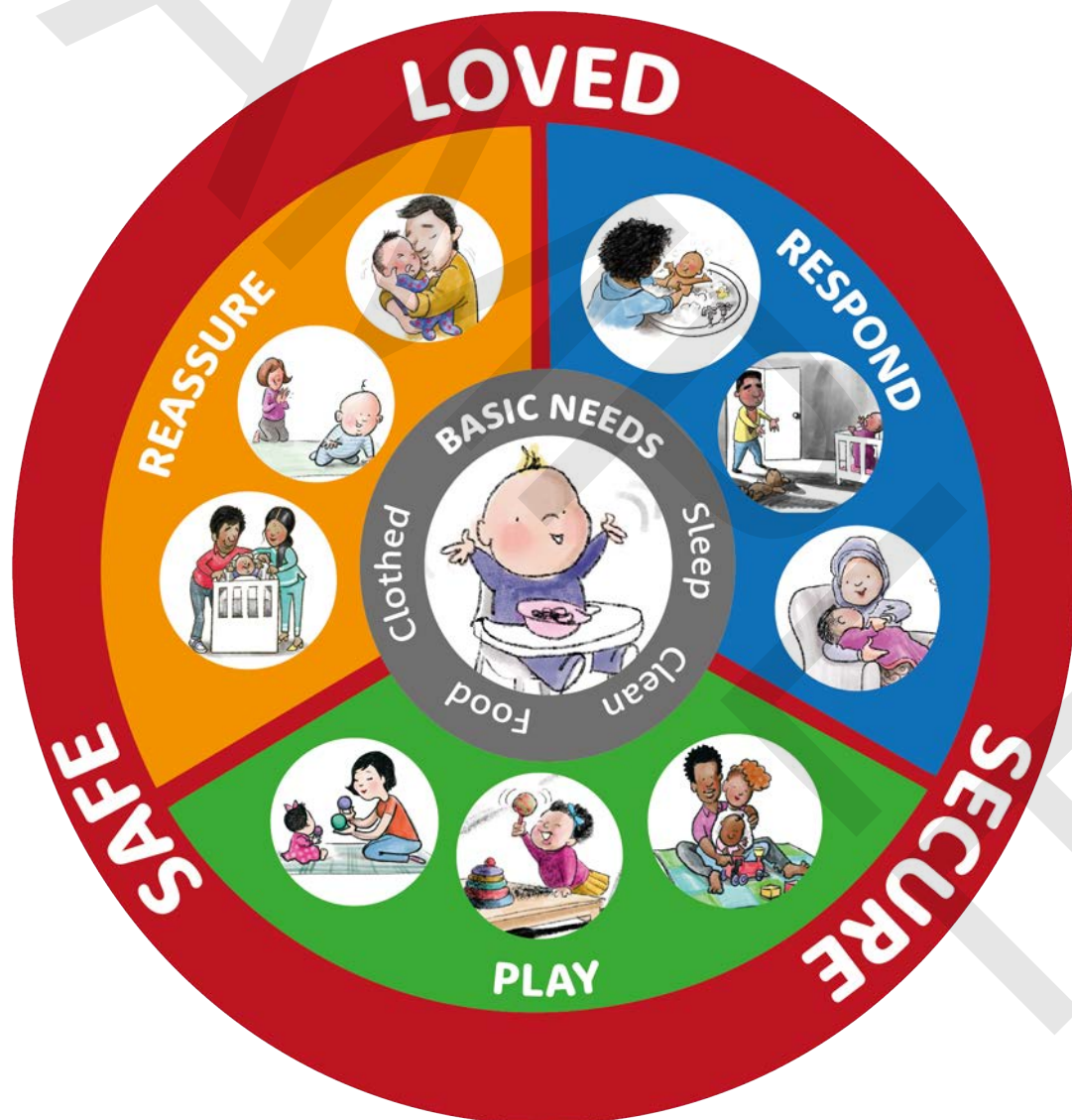
Let's look at why a strong and secure attachment can help our babies as they develop.

When our baby develops a strong and secure attachment it:

- Makes baby feel calm, safe, and loved, helping them feed well, play well, and sleep well
- Gives baby confidence for learning, now and as they grow
- Teaches baby how to have positive relationships throughout their lives
- Helps baby understand how to manage their emotions

Q: What might happen if a baby doesn't develop a strong attachment?

Without this strong attachment, it can signal to a baby that they are not safe, loved, or secure which can influence how they trust others and view the world as they grow up.



As well as meeting our baby's basic needs, we have an important role to play in helping our baby feel loved, safe, and secure. Creating a strong attachment helps this to happen.

We can see that having a strong, positive attachment with our babies is really important. Now we'll think about how we can do this. We all have it in us to be able to do this well - you can do it!

How do we develop a strong attachment with our baby?

How we interact with our baby and the way our baby communicates with us all helps develop a strong attachment.

Q: How easy or hard have you found bonding with your baby?

Q: What have we found helps us bond with our baby?

Q: How might building a strong attachment with our baby look different for mums, dads, grandparents, and other adults in our baby's life?

The key ways we can form a strong attachment with our babies is by **responding** to them, **reassuring** them and **playing** with them.

Responding to our baby

Q: Has anyone been told that they are 'spoiling' their baby or storing up trouble by going to their baby each time they cry?

Q: Or does anyone find it a lot of pressure to have their baby close to them at all times?

Note: Bring out points below either in the conversation or as an added element if not been addressed already rather than simply reading it out.

Bonding with our baby develops when we consistently respond to our babies with love, warmth, and care. We all have a vital role to play in building a strong attachment with our baby. We want to show our baby through our facial expression and tone of voice that we understand how they are feeling. We might not always be able to tell why our baby is crying but by responding with warmth we let them know that we're always there for them.

We may hear different opinions on how we should or shouldn't be behaving with our baby. Research suggests that paying attention to our babies, especially in the first year, is especially important as baby is learning how to bring those intense feelings back to a comfortable level by having parents help them. This helps them gradually learn how to do it for themselves as they get older. Often this will start with thinking about why baby is upset.



Understanding our baby's communication

Q: How can we show our baby we are interested in them and curious about them?

Activity: We now have another opportunity to practice some of what we have been talking about. If your baby is asleep or there is too much going on, come back to this in your own time. With any babies in the room who are awake and calm, try and test out the difference between showing your baby attention with and without interest and curiosity. For example, try playing 'peekaboo' with little variety in your tone or without much enthusiasm, then try it with an excited tone and smile and see if the baby responds differently. *For those who are still pregnant, draw them into the conversation by asking what they notice.*

Q: What did you notice?

When we engage with our baby, it is like we are coordinating with our baby's communication in order to connect with them.

Many of baby's communication signals are in fact silent, e.g., rooting, arching back, kicking, clenching fists etc. which means that it can be easy for us to miss them, especially if we have other responsibilities to focus on such as older children.

We might not always know what our babies are thinking but we can be **constantly curious** about what they are experiencing. This helps us to see our baby in a way that builds a strong bond with them from the very beginning. Paying attention to our babies is vital, and the most effective way to do this is with also showing interest and curiosity.



Q: Can anyone think what distracts us most often throughout the day?

Apart from our baby, one thing that often grabs our attention throughout the day is likely to be our phones, whether it's social media or messages. It's easy to be unaware of how much time we spend looking at our phones.

Q: What might be the drawback to spending time on our phone in front of our baby?

E.g., prompt discussion around missing baby's cues, playing with baby, chatting with baby, bonding with baby.

It's easy for us to spend a lot of time on our phone, especially when we are at home with a newborn baby, but this means we can miss our baby's initial cues, which can result in them getting more upset, making it harder for us to calm them and then meet their needs.

Q: How can we be careful about how we use screens, including phones, around our baby?

Although phones are great for helping us stay connected with friends and family when we might otherwise feel isolated, we can also be intentional about how often we use screens around our baby.

- Consider whether it is possible to dedicate times when you don't have to multitask between your baby and notifications from your phone.
- Try using the "do not disturb" or silent setting on your phone especially when you are enjoying one-on-one playtime or at mealtimes.

Reassuring our baby

We can strengthen our attachment with our baby by the way we reassure them when they are distressed.

Q: What have you found helps to reassure your baby?

We can do this by:

- Soothing them with our words and touch
- Holding them
- Gently rocking them
- Chatting with them as we change their nappy or get them dressed
- Calming them as they go to sleep
- Giving eye contact to baby as we feed them



Babies can recognise our voice and smell from very early on. They recognise their parents' faces very quickly and this also reassures them.

Q: How easy do you find it to be kind and loving in your response to your baby?

Q: When do you find it hardest?

Each time we reassure baby, we build the capacity for them to reassure themselves.

Taking time to look after ourselves and release some stress from our 'stress bucket' can help us to be more patient when our baby needs reassurance from us – working as a team with our parenting teammate to share the load, whenever we can, will also help.

As our baby gets older, they will become more active and will naturally explore more. We want to be their safe base from which they are able to separate from us and go off and explore their environment safely. Knowing they can return to us for reassurance and comfort if they get upset will help them to feel confident to go off and explore again.

Playing with our baby

Q: What do you do that your baby enjoys? How can you tell that they are enjoying it?

Start by sharing an example of what you would do to play with your baby and what could be hard about this. Point out any great examples of playing that you've seen the parents do.

By spending time playing with our baby, it deepens the bond between us and them, as well as stimulating their brains. Babies don't just want toys - they want us!

Babies love it when we:

- **Talk to them** – about anything! What we are doing, where we are going...
- **Copy the sounds they make**
- **Make eye contact with them**
- **Use a playful, high-pitched voice**
- **Help them explore their senses**, such as touch through stroking etc.
- **Sing nursery rhymes**, pop songs, or make up new songs
- **Play peekaboo** – hide your face behind your hands, and then jump out smiling and say 'boo!'
- **Blow bubbles**
- **Dance with them** to your favourite music
- **Play splashing games** with water in the bath
- **Build a tower** of old (but clean!) cereal boxes, yogurt pots, plastic bowls for your child to knock over
- **Climb over piles of cushions** on the floor like an obstacle course
- **Get older children involved** if you have them – ask them which songs you could teach the baby together or pretend the baby sounds are your own 'family language' you're putting together

A simple way of starting to play with our babies is by mimicking their sounds, movements and facial expressions. It helps babies to feel safe and begin to understand more about what they are experiencing.

Activity: Let's try some of the things from this list now with our own babies if they are awake and calm. If not, think which one of these ideas you could try in the next few days. *Encourage parents to hold their baby facing them or lie on the floor with them and copy their actions and sounds. Be encouraging when they give it a go and demonstrate with a doll if there is any reluctance to try it. Pay particular attention to gently encouraging dads, those who are feeling self-conscious, or those who haven't joined in with activities before. For those who are still pregnant, draw them into the conversation by asking them to mark on the list the thing they will want to try with their new baby.*

Remember: The key ways we can form a strong attachment with our babies is by **responding** to them, **reassuring** them and **playing** with them.



Let's now think about:

When can attachment and bonding happen?

The bond between a parent and baby begins in pregnancy and develops and strengthens once baby is born.

Q: Who can give an example of feeling connected to their unborn baby?

We can even start to form an attachment with our infant during pregnancy by:

- Talking/singing to the 'bump'. Babies can hear from 29 weeks and Mum's voice is very clear to them. They can also hear other sounds and voices, so partners can also start to bond with their babies before they are born.
- Tuning in to baby's movements - try to enjoy them. This is a good way for partner to start bonding with baby.
- Playing music to baby

The early days, weeks and months form the foundations for baby to have a strong emotional attachment throughout their lives, to parents and caregivers, but also in all of their other relationships.

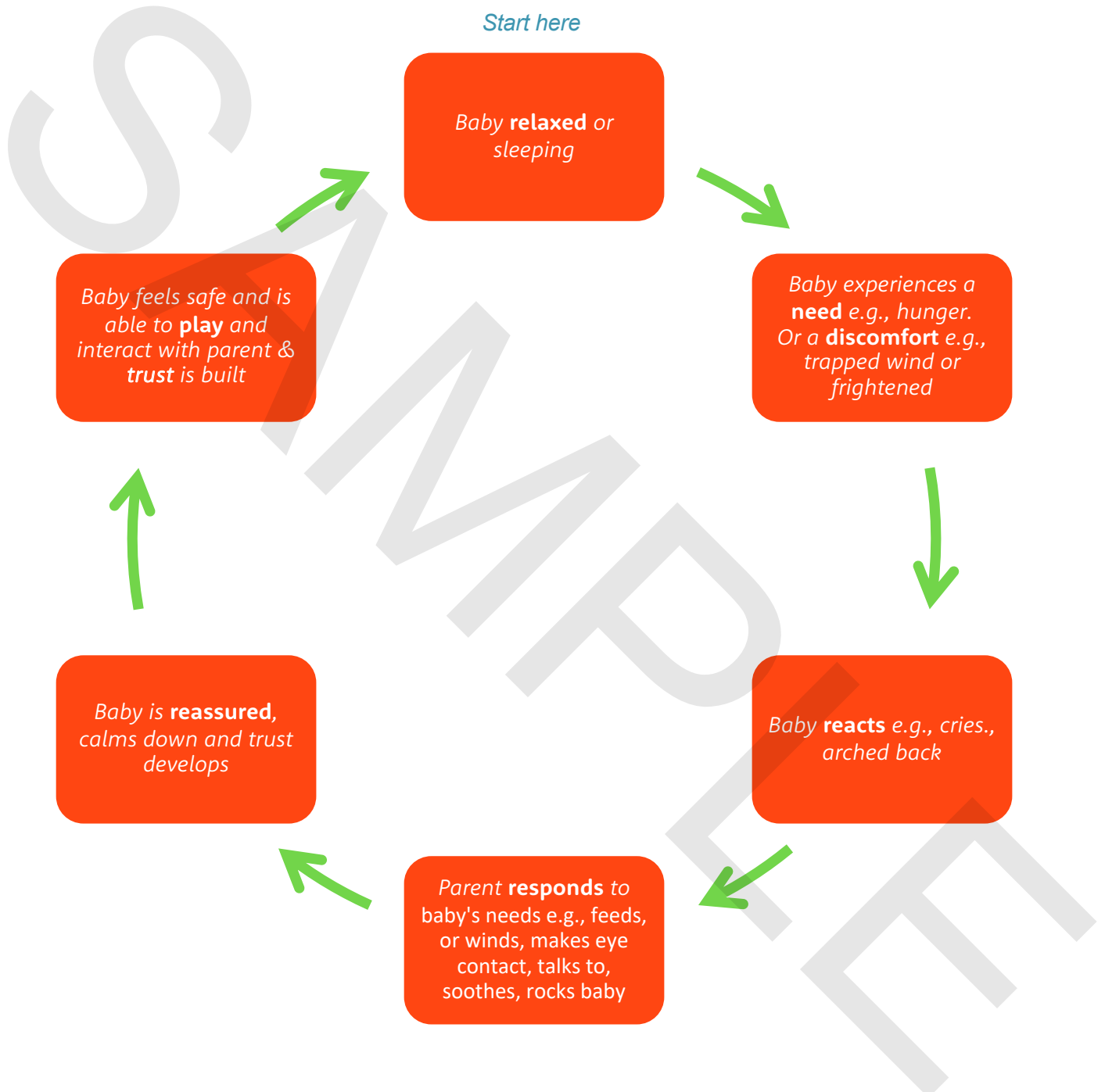
Even if you don't feel it straight away, this bond can grow over time. The important thing for us to remember is that bonding and attachment is something we can start today and build on gradually over time.



Building a strong bond with our baby

This diagram summarises how attachment and bonding work and the role we play:

Talk through an example of something that has happened in the session (where a parent has positively responded to a baby's needs) or give an example of reassuring the baby when they are hungry.





Our new family

There are lots of things that can influence our emotional connection with our baby. Importantly, though, studies show that best way for a child to develop a secure and healthy attachment is not what happened to their parents when they were children, but rather how their parents made sense of their own childhood experiences.

The ways in which our own parents looked after us can have a big influence on what we expect to be doing as a parent. Sometimes we want to be just the same – sometimes we want to do things completely differently!

You may need to explain that ‘making sense of your own childhood experiences’ is about understanding what your experiences were, why these happened, and how they might affect us.

Q: Who was a helpful parental figure in your childhood? How did they strengthen their bond with you?

Q: Did you have any negative experiences of being parented which are affecting you now as an adult?

Q: Are there things you don’t want to repeat?

For some parents, their experiences of being parented might have been exceptionally tough or distressing and if they notice strong feelings about this then they may want to talk about this with a professional, such as a counsellor.

Talking to our parenting teammate about this is important as we all come with different experiences and expectations of parenting.

Q: What do you know about the way your parenting teammate was parented?

Q: Have you shared anything with them about the way you were parented?

Positive past relationships will give us confidence in how we bond with our babies, but past hurts may have a negative impact on our confidence and ability to bond with our babies.

For example, if we were regularly shouted at, ignored, or criticised as a child when we had a need, we might have thought that our needs were not important and that we are not worth other people’s love and time. This may affect how we connect with our baby.

If you have one, share an example to start with.

For some of us, we are still in close contact with our own parents or parental figures, or those of our parenting teammate, and this can bring both helpful support and potential stresses and tensions. Being able to talk to our parenting teammate about this is an important way of building our identity as a new family unit but takes time and honesty.

Let’s wrap up these thoughts by answering the following questions:

- From my own experience of being parented:**
- One way my parents/carer(s) helped me feel well looked after was**
.....
- One thing I want to do differently is**



Looking after ourselves & balancing our time

It's time for our weekly 'check-in' with ourselves - giving ourselves space to notice how we are feeling so that we can make sure we are trying to look after ourselves as well as our babies and our other relationships.

Q: How are you feeling this week?

Q: How easy or hard has it been to look after yourself this past week?

Looking after ourselves, and our relationships, will also make it easier for us to bond well with our babies – we are all interconnected! If we are feeling overwhelmed, anxious, or tearful, finding time to recharge can help us to cope with the pressure.

To improve our mental health and wellbeing, it can be useful to schedule your time to include a balance of different types of activities. We can think about activities as being in one of three categories: Everyday activities, Must-do activities, and Fun activities.

Everyday activities – e.g., showering, dressing, cooking, food shopping

Must-do activities – e.g., medical appointments, paying bills

Fun activities – e.g., reading, seeing friends, enjoying a hobby

It can help our wellbeing if we have a balance of these activities scheduled into the week. If life feels more like it is filled with the everyday and must-do tasks, then it can be helpful to remember fun activities are ACE.

Fun activities are **ACE** because they help develop a sense of:

- **Achievement** (e.g., learning a new skill)
- **Connection** (e.g., time spent with a friend)
- or **Enjoyment** (e.g., reading or getting outdoors)

By coming to Babies Matter you are already investing time in all 3 of the ACE categories, as we are developing our parenting skills, connecting with each other, and enjoying ourselves at the same time.

Q: Who has noticed the difference it makes having this time for 'Achievement', 'Connection' and 'Enjoyment' built into the week?

The following section is on page 12 of the Guest Booklet.

We are going to do an activity to help us look at how we balance our time. If we think of this complete circle as all our time, how would you divide it up into 'slices' to show much time you spend on:

Everyday activities?

Must-do activities?

Fun activities?

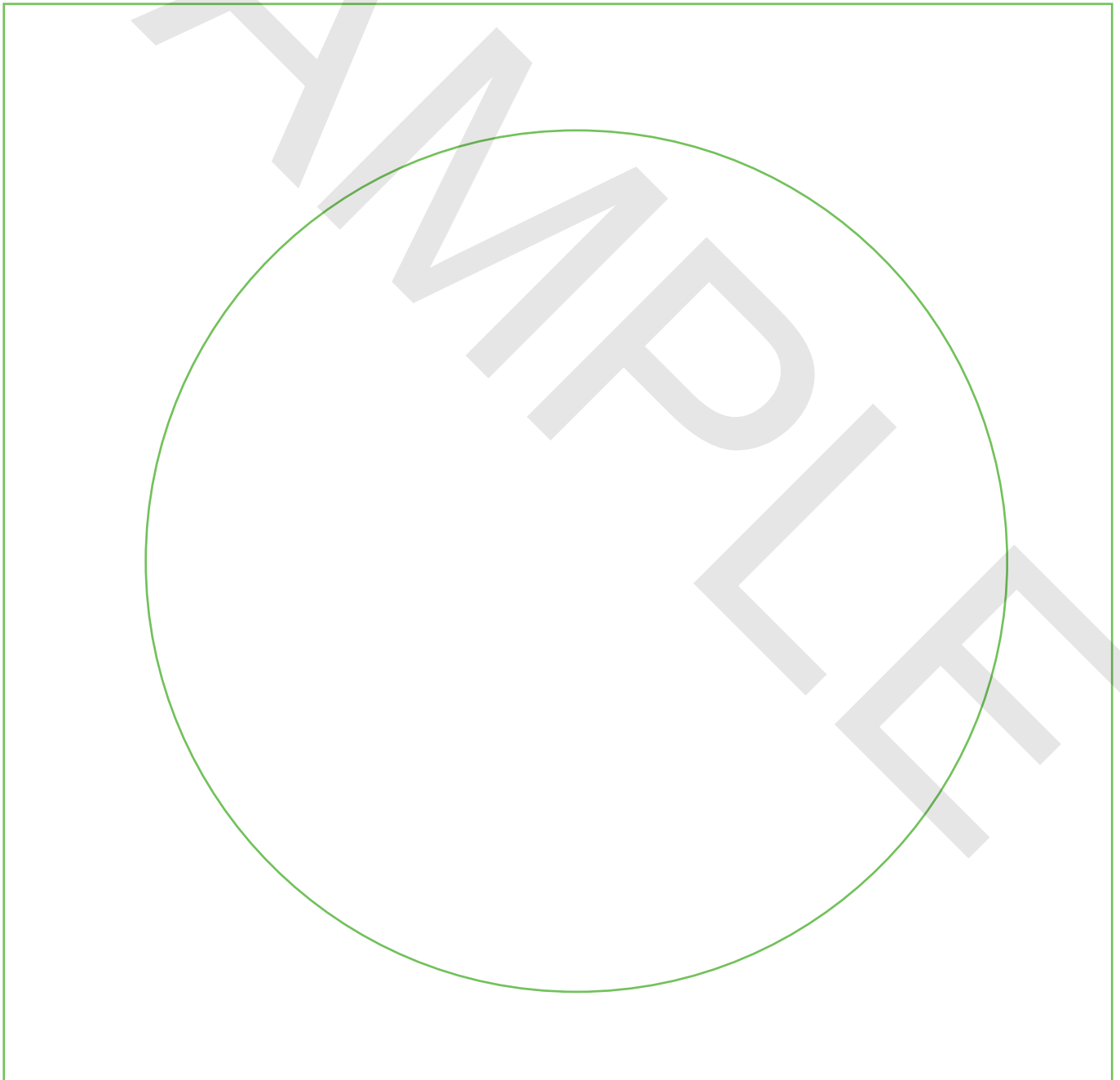
Prepare yours ahead of the session and show it as an example.

Q: Looking at your 'time pie', what do you notice?

Q: How might / has having a baby change(d) how you spend your time?

It can be easy to feel guilty about how we spend our time. Taking time to reflect on this is a great way of starting to find a balance with our time.

Q: What is one thing you can try to do more of or less of this week to bring balance to how you spend your time?



Summing up....

This section is on page 13 of the Guest Booklet.

Today we have thought about how we can work at strengthening the bond between us and our babies, so that our babies can flourish and be their best. **The key ways we can encourage babies to form a strong attachment with us is by responding to them, reassuring them and playing with them.** We have discussed our experience of being parented ourselves and the need to look after ourselves well, so that we can look after our babies well. But remember, there are no perfect parents! As long as we try to respond to our babies with warmth and care, they will feel secure and build healthy relationships with us and others around them throughout their lives.

Q: What have you found helpful from today's session?

Next week, we will be discussing helping our baby develop – getting to know our babies in their first days, weeks, and months.

At the end of the session:

- *Look at the Top Tips*
- *Make sure you have WhatsApp group set up*
- *Encourage them all to come back and thank them for their contribution today*
- *Say something about what you enjoyed or learned today*
- *Offer food to them all to take away*
- *Don't rush off! Be available for anyone who wants to chat*

After the session:

- *Fill in the register according to your church/organisation's GDPR policy*
- *Send a message to anyone who didn't make the session*







Notes

Handwriting practice area with 20 horizontal dotted lines.

SAMPLE



As parents, we have an important role to play in helping our babies feel safe and know that their needs are going to be met by us; this builds up a strong bond



The key ways we can form a strong attachment with our babies is by **'responding'** to them, **'reassuring'** them and **'playing'** with them.



Getting a balance with the activities we spent our time on can help with looking after our wellbeing. What can you do that helps you feel a sense of:

- Achievement
- Connection
- Enjoyment



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