



SESSION

4

# Babies Matter: Building strong relationships

NAME: .....

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## Babies Matter: Building strong relationships



**BABIES  
MATTER**

A KIDS MATTER PROGRAMME

### Pre-Session planning list

To do	To buy	To prepare	Babies Matter resources
Reminder text to parents	Refreshments	Doll / teddy bear	Facilitator's Booklet
Double check room is booked	Flowers	Kettle, mugs, water, spoons, plastic cups, plates	Group register
Collate toys / blankets for babies		Tablecloth, napkins	Postcards
Sticky labels for names		Current information on local resources in the community <b>especially details on domestic abuse support</b>	Listening role play cards and disagreeing well role play cards
Pray! Prompt others to pray for you		Tissues	Pens
		Supplies for baby changing facilities (nappies, wipes, nappy bags)	

### 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
- Welcome people as they arrive – be ready to welcome guests up to 15 minutes early.
- Offer a tea/coffee/water; make sure hot drinks are covered if using disposable cups

Note: This session has a lot of content so in your preparation, you might want to think through what topics have already come up and which ones may be particularly helpful for your group.

**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 3  
 Parent/carer understands what good listening involves Parent/carer understands how to disagree well  
 Parent/carer recognises the importance of saying 'sorry' and forgiveness Parent/carer has identified positive relationships in their lives and their importance

### Review of Session 3

Ask the group what they found memorable or helpful from last week's session. You might need to remind them what we covered (baby's temperament, coping emotionally, using open questions to encourage conversation).

Last time we met, we talked about understanding our baby's temperament, different milestones our baby reaches, handling big emotions and the importance of talking and listening in our parenting teams.

Q: Did anyone have time to discuss any of those topics with your parenting teammate at home?

Q: We thought about having the question 'what is my baby trying to tell me?' in our minds; who came back to this during the week?

Q: Is there anything from the last session that stuck with you or that you have thought more about over the week?



### 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

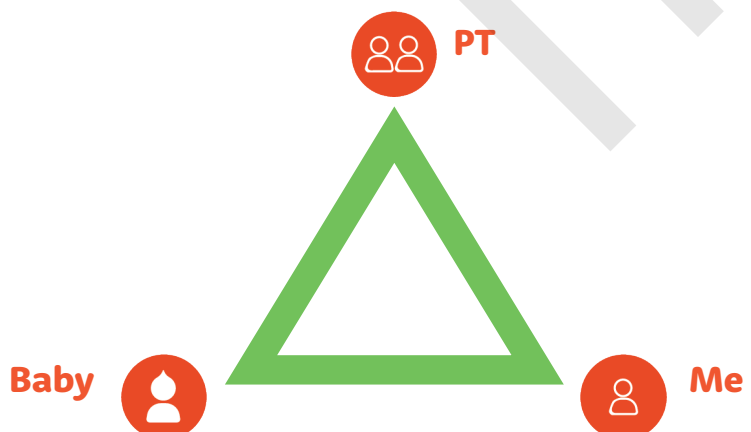
Today we are going to spend time focusing on what it takes to build strong relationships. These could be with parents, grandparents, or close friends. The quality of our PT has a huge impact on 'me' and 'baby' as well, as all three points of the triangle are interconnected.

*Refer back to the diagram from Session 1 that explains 'Baby's Needs':*

Q: How does looking after our relationships help to meet our baby's needs?

Working on keeping our PT strong and healthy as we navigate changes and pressures is not easy but will help us in our parenting and will help our babies thrive. A strong relationship gives our baby an example on which to base the relationships that they form as they grow and creates a safe, loving, and secure environment for them to develop in.

*Throughout this session and the programme, you might want to change the term 'parenting teammate' to 'co-parent' if that is more appropriate. Reassure single parents that this content is relevant to their parenting team and look out for specific ways to be inclusive of their circumstances.*







## Building a strong relationship

Q: Who are the key people closest to your baby?

*If there are pregnant mothers in your group, ask:*

Q: Who do you imagine will be the people closest to your baby once they are born?

*Encourage guests to complete the following:*

**The people who are closest to / who will be closest to my baby are**

.....

Like in our 'parenting teams', the people who have a relationship with our baby may be helpful or be a cause of stress or worry to us. Whether you are parenting alone, have a mix of relationships in your life, or have one main relationship that you rely on to help you parent, you can help to build strong relationships with those around us and the people in your baby's life. *If possible, give an example of a relationship you have had to work on to benefit your children as well as yourself.*

Knowing how to have a strong relationship is something that we all have to learn and practice, it doesn't happen by magic! If this is something that feels unfamiliar to you or isn't something that has been role modelled, that does not mean it's too late to start. This will benefit us, our baby, and our parenting teammate relationships.

In this session we are going to talk about how we do this. We are going to talk about these techniques as 'ingredients' – meaning each one is something you can 'add in' to your relationships and start practicing, adding another 'ingredient' when you are ready. They can be applied to our parenting teammate relationship, or to our relationship with anyone in our baby's life.

We are going to look at 3 'ingredients' for a strong relationship:

- Communication and listening
- Disagreeing well
- Saying sorry and forgiveness





## Communication and listening

We might have heard that good communication is important in healthy relationships so let's think about this a bit more and why it is one of the ingredients needed for a strong relationship.

**Q: How have you noticed that your communication has changed since becoming pregnant/a parent?**

Our communication may change when we become parents. We talked in the last session about how the way we think and talk about our baby will impact the bond we have with them; the same is true in our other relationships. If we can think positively about our PT, and keep in mind what they might be feeling or experiencing, this will strengthen our relationship with them.

**Q: What happens when we don't communicate well with our parenting teammate?**

When we are stressed it's easy to misunderstand those closest to us. Doing things that are familiar to us can suddenly become more difficult once we have had a baby, and we are also facing lots of new challenges, such as tiredness, feeding, getting our baby to sleep, our own emotions, and managing other responsibilities. Being able to work as a team, and understand each other's feelings and needs, can help us through these early days.

One way to strengthen our relationships is to increase that feeling of being understood and understanding others. We can do this by listening.



Q: What makes a 'good' listener? How can you tell if someone is listening to you?

Good Listening	Bad Listening
Lean towards the person e.g., nod, give comfortable eye contact, face each other	No eye contact
Show genuine attention and interest (mute devices)	Distracted by devices or others in room
Be patient – allow silence if it is helpful	Interrupt and finish sentences
Accept and don't judge	Correct or undermine what was said
Let them speak without interruption	Tell them about your experience
Repeat back what you have understood	Give advice when it hasn't been asked for

Having a new baby often means our attention is totally taken up with attending to their needs which can lead to feelings like anger, frustration, or bitterness. This makes it harder to pay attention and fully listen to our parenting teammate.

We are going to do a quick role play to help us put this into practice!

Ask for two volunteers – one to be the 'speaker' and one to be the 'listener'. Give out the role play cards and ask them to firstly act out the 'bad listening' example, before feeding back as a group. Then ask them to act out the 'good listening' example and feedback as a group.

Q: How did it feel watching each role play?

Q: What did you notice about the 'speaker' during these examples?

When we are listened to, we are more likely to share honestly and feel appreciated; misunderstandings are less likely when we are listening well.

### Exercise:

At home this week, find a time where you and your parenting teammate can take it in turns to talk for 3 minutes about something you want to share - and practice listening well to each other using the 'good listening' ideas above.

## Disagreements in my Parenting Team

Another ingredient for a strong relationship is learning to disagree well. *If this is a sensitive topic for some in your group, be mindful of giving space for sharing whilst still keeping the conversation moving for others.*

Q: What do you think are the common causes of arguments in families?

The main causes of conflict within families are:

- Money
- Activities - how we use our free time
- Housework
- Extended family
- Sex
- Parenting



## How on-going conflict can affect children

It's very normal in a relationship to argue, but it can increase when we are under pressure. Finding ways to reduce misunderstandings and disagreements between us is important for our own mental health and our ongoing relationship. As we talked about in Session 2, our baby looks to us to feel loved, safe, and secure, and is sensitive to the atmosphere around them. Disagreeing well with the adults in our baby's life is a skill we can all learn that will help our children to grow up in an environment where they can thrive and the benefits will stretch into later life, too; it's not too late to start.

We are all learning, and no one can be perfect. We are aiming to be 'good enough' and finding ways to put these ingredients into practice is one way of doing this.



## Disagreeing well

Let's think about an example where a PT might have said or done something that's annoyed the other person... A simple example could be:

*E.g., You've been trying to settle baby. PT comes up and takes baby off your hands.*

Q: What might you think? *Prompt for both positive and negative interpretations*

*E.g., 'They think I'm a rubbish parent. I'm no good at this.' 'They can see I'm so tired and are helping me out.'*

Q: Let's imagine your immediate thought was more negative: what could you do before reacting?

If there is tension or disagreement developing between us, try to:

- **Pause before responding** – take some slow deep breaths, count to 10
- **Think positive** - try not to think the worst. Ask yourself could I have misinterpreted the situation? What is a positive reason for why they acted the way they did?
- **Share how you feel without blaming** – Try completing this sentence: 'I feel like a useless parent... When you take baby off me when she's crying... Because I've had a really tough day and I'm exhausted... What I need is to feel recognised that I've looked after baby by myself all day and done a great job and that I deserve a break. To be made a cuppa and have baby taken off my hands for a while...'  
*Read out the above completed sentence.* Notice how there is a lot of referring to myself rather than my parenting teammate. I own my own feelings and experiences and then communicate that to my PT, rather than using lots of sentences that start with 'you'. This is a valuable and important way of communicating our feelings towards others effectively.
- Try to be **kind and respectful** and see things from their point of view. Be ready to listen as well as speak
- **Find common ground** – instead of trying to win the argument, try to find areas you can agree on
- **Call a 'timeout'** if you feel that you need time to process what is being shared or want to avoid it escalating

Q: Which of these would be the easiest thing to try next time you are having a disagreement?

*We talk later in the session about what to do when disagreements escalate and pose a threat to someone but if this comes up here and needs to be addressed, bring this part forward.*



When we feel frustrated, angry, or defensive, we are not in a good position to communicate. This is because our brains go into a fight or flight mode, meaning effective communication is unlikely.

Sometimes we need a break for only a few minutes, other times it may take hours, maybe even a day or two. The trick is to not let it go on for too long and to find a way to resolve the issue or agree to disagree respectfully.

**Activity:** To practice this, we are going to do a role play in pairs with one person addressing a tension and the other person responding.

*Give out role play cards and do an example first with your group helper using a different scenario (e.g., 'I'm finding it hard that you hand the baby to me when they start crying and feel like I do most of the settling and nappy changes').*

Q: How did you find trying to share how you were feeling without blaming? How easy was it to think of the positives?

Q: What difference did it make focusing on finding common ground?

Although it will take practice to disagree well, it is one of the ingredients that will strengthen our relationships and benefit our baby as well as our own wellbeing.

## **Saying 'sorry' and forgiveness**

Sometimes disagreements or difficult moments cause hurt to one another, and we must find a way to reconnect again. This is where the 'ingredient' saying 'sorry' and forgiveness comes in.

Q: How easy do you find it to say 'sorry' to your parenting teammate?

Q: What might happen if you don't apologise when you've made a mistake?

Q: What are the benefits of saying sorry? How does it benefit our baby?

**Saying sorry** is a way of showing regret when we've done something wrong. Being able to apologise, whether it's for something we have said or done, whether we meant to or not, shows that we value the relationship more than our own pride, and want to be able to repair it. It also benefits our baby as it models to them an important skill. This takes courage but apologising for the little things helps us to be able to say it for the bigger things too and helps us to rebuild trust.

### **How to say sorry:**

- Say it without adding excuses - say "I'm sorry" without following with the word "but"
- Admit responsibility for your behaviour or actions
- Make amends (by doing things differently next time)
- Assure them you will do your best to avoid it happening again
- Admit responsibility for your behaviour or actions and try not to blame your parenting teammate

**Activity:** Think of something you've done in the past week which you could have said 'sorry' for but didn't manage to. It could be something such as snapping at our PT about something they did or getting frustrated with the way they did a household chore. Using the tips above, practice with someone how you would say sorry.

*Give an example from your own week: 'I'm sorry that I shouted when you spilt tea over the carpet; it's my responsibility to keep my temper in check and I didn't do that. I'll do my best to not shout like that next time.'*



**Forgiveness** is a key part of every relationship - because we all make mistakes and can end up upsetting each other. If we hold on to hurt, disappointment or feeling angry, then we will build up a wall of resentment, which will prevent the relationship from being the best it can be.

Q: What are the benefits of forgiveness to both people who are involved? And to our baby?

**When we say 'sorry' and forgive each other, we can:**

- Reduce our desire to seek revenge
- Strengthen our relationship
- Model healthy relationship habits to our baby
- Reduce feelings of resentment

Forgiveness does not mean that we pretend there was no hurt or wrong-doing, or that we have forgotten it, but it means that we are choosing to move on together, for the sake of our relationship. It can take time - don't expect instant forgiveness. You may need to show in your actions that it won't happen again.

Behaviour that does not change, or remains purposefully hurtful or dangerous, is behaviour that no one should tolerate. Seeking help and finding a way to be safe may be necessary. Please let your Babies Matter group facilitator know if you are in a situation that you feel concerned about, as there is guidance and support available.





## Looking after ourselves & positive relationships

As humans, we are social creatures and good relationships are central to our wellbeing. As well as strengthening our parenting relationships, it's good to think about the other relationships in our life. Having meaningful, positive relationships boosts our levels of happiness and these social connections are vital, especially when we have a baby, as we're likely to spend more time at home alone caring for our infant.

Q: Does anyone have friends or family members they relax and socialise with outside of the 'triangle'? What are the benefits of this?

Q: Has anyone noticed that their friendships have changed since having a baby or getting pregnant?

Q: : Where have people found it easy to take their baby and meet new people so far? *Encourage group to share their ideas and add in your own if needed.*

Often new friendships don't form overnight and take effort to develop. Be patient and trust you have something of value to add to a relationship. By being here at Babies Matter you are already investing in positive, new relationships.

### This week:

Think of a relationship or friendship that encourages you; what could you do to spend time investing in your relationship with this person?



## Summing up...

Today we have talked about communicating well and we practiced good and bad listening. We have also thought about how we can manage disagreements in our relationships in a healthy way. This means our babies can grow up seeing us resolve arguments, giving them the skills to build strong relationships in their lives.

Q: What is one thing that has been helpful for you today?

Next week, we are going to be discussing ways that we help our baby to thrive with a focus on play, and more top tips of strengthening our relationships and looking after our wellbeing.

### At the end of the session:

- *Look at the Top Tips*
- *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:

- *Write down any great quotes you heard today*
- *Send messages to anyone who didn't make the session*



Notes

Handwriting practice area with 20 horizontal dotted lines.

SAMPLE

Working on keeping our Parenting Team strong and healthy as we navigate changes and pressures is not easy, but will help us in our parenting and will help our babies thrive



Part of good communication is being able to listen well:

- Lean in
- Show interest
- Be patient
- Accept & don't judge
- Let them speak without interrupting
- Repeat back what you have understood



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