

Creating attachment with books

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Ten-month-old Kyle had been stacking blocks with his mom. Repeatedly they had built small towers and knocked them down. “Oh no! Fall down!” Maybe it was the excitement of causing his blocks to crash that led Kyle to chuck one of them across the room. Fluffy the cat, who had been curled up asleep, felt the wooden block land solidly between her ears. Fluffy sprang to life and hissed. Kyle’s smile vanished. His lower lip trembled. After long seconds of sharp inward gasps, he began to cry.

Kyle’s mom gathered Kyle into her arms. “It’s ok. Fluffy was just scared.” She rocked Kyle gently and reached for one of his books from the floor. Cuddled together she began to read one of their favourite board books, “I Love You Through and Through” by Bernadette Rossetti-Shustak and Caroline Jayne Church.

Kyle’s mom hadn’t read the research; yet she intuitively knew how to create attachment.

British psychologist John Bowlby first coined the term “Attachment” about 50 years ago. Since that time theorists, psychologists and social workers have become increasingly aware of how new babies need a special adult in their life to protect, nurture, and comfort them. Loving care is foundational to a baby’s ability to trust that his needs will be met, to know she is valued and that her world is a safe, predictable place. Parent-child attachment is seen as the cornerstone of child development enabling babies to grow into curious toddlers, confident children, and independent adults who can attach securely in adult relationships.

Attachment Parenting International identifies eight principles of parenting that nurture this sense of security and attachment. <http://www.attachmentparenting.org/principles/intro.php>

These principles emphasize that babies need to know they are loved, respected and valued them from their moment of birth. We give them these messages through our timely responsiveness, our actions and our words.

Kyle’s mom could also have comforted Kyle by snuggling up to read the board book “How Do I Love You?” By Marion Dane Bauer and Caroline Jayne Church. It too describes love through the everyday experiences of a young child.

Kyle’s three-year-old sister enjoys hearing “How Do Dinosaurs Say I Love You” by Jane Yolen and Mark Teague. It’s message? Regardless of children’s moods or actions, they are loveable and loved (even if they are dinosaurs.)

Sometimes Kyle’s mom tries to describe the depth of her love for her children with the classic story “Guess How Much I Love You” by Sam Bratney and Anita Jeram.

Tomorrow she will read Kyle and his sister “Ten Little Fingers and Ten Little Toes” by Mem Fox, a story that reassures her own children that they have an extraordinary place in her life.

“Ten Little Fingers and Ten Little Toes” will remind her too that, regardless of country, culture or circumstances into which babies are born, children are very much the same. In places close to home; in places as far away as Haiti, children need to know they are loved and cared for by someone in their life.