



Anita Hains gets down on the floor with her daughter, Zoey, 10 months. Sometimes she becomes a “mommy jungle gym,” as she puts it.

JODI FUSON/For the Lincoln Journal Star

# BRINGING UP BABY

## Care during first year of life sets stage for healthy parent-child relationship

**BY JODI FUSON**

For the Lincoln Journal Star

Those first few days of a newborn's life are all about bonding. But the rest of his or her life is all about attachment, according to University of California-Davis professor of psychology Ross A. Thompson.

Attachment is a developing relationship between the parent and child that determines the degree to which a child will be secure, he says. “A baby's need to be attached to one or more caregivers is as strong a biological drive as learning to walk or talk,” he adds.

Thompson, well known for his research on attachment, spent 20 years in the psychology department at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln before heading to California in 2003. He studies primarily preschoolers and

has worked with the California Department of Education to identify social and emotional signs of school readiness.

He says biological attachment has served humans well because it makes it more likely that they will be fed and nurtured.

“The infant needs to have the sense that the parent will be there when they need them,” he says. In turn, the child develops a sense of security based on how he's cared for.

Thompson said the sensitivity and responsiveness of the adult or adults caring for the baby, as well as their availability, helps determine the level of care. Commercial products, such as slings, aren't required to help babies become attached, he says. More important is following

your baby's interests. Parents must be able to free themselves from any other agenda and respond to their baby's cues, he said.

Injecting periods of “quality time” isn't enough, but staying home full time isn't required either, he adds. A high-quality day care is fine as long as the baby is well cared for and the care provider responds to him.

Erica and Scott McClurg's 9-month-old twin girls, Jovie and Reagan, go to a home day care. Erica said she likes the attentiveness and affection her day care provider shows her girls.

“She loves them as much as I do,” she says. “She's been excellent with them.”

For working parents like the McClurgs, Thompson suggests making time for baby before and after work.

At the end of the workday moms and dads should spend about half an hour with their child one-on-one before moving on to other activities, such as preparing dinner. He adds that after this one-on-one time, the child will often respond better to entertaining himself for a while.

Erica and Scott have settled on a morning and afternoon routine that allows both of them to interact with the twins. Erica awakens them for a 5:30 a.m. nursing session, then puts them back down for about another hour of sleep. Scott then dresses them and takes them to day care.

After work, Erica picks up Reagan and Jovie and brings them home for some one-on-one time before Scott arrives. Then they team up to feed the girls. After that, ➡

there's time for a bath if needed and another nursing session at about 6:30 p.m. before they put the twins to bed.

The McClurgs like to read and talk to their girls, and they said they keep the television off while the girls are awake. Erica also has noticed that if the radio is off, the girls talk more.

Forming a secure attachment is directly tied to a baby's emotional well-being, Thompson says. When infants have a strong attachment, it leads to good things later in life. It helps children develop exploration skills because they have a secure base and shapes their personality.

It's also important to relate to your baby appropriately as he matures, Thompson said. That's about finding ways to develop confidence and security that are suitable to each age.



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**Scott and Erica McClurg team up to feed their 9-month-old twins, Reagan, left, and Jovie, right. The couple dedicates their time and attention to the girls from the time they arrive home from work until they put them to bed around 7.**

Denise Savage, mother of Natalie, 2½, and Emily, 8 months, says that when she has one-on-one time with her oldest, she lets her lead.

"If she wants to do puz-

zles, we do puzzles. If she wants to run around in circles, we run around in circles," she said.

As for Emily, Denise plays games like patty-cake and

peek-a-boo to encourage her interaction.

Anita Hains likes to crawl around on the floor with her 10-month-old daughter, Zoey, because she can see the delight in her eyes.

"I become the mommy jungle gym," she says.

Developing a secure attachment is an ongoing process. As a child starts to talk, the conversations he has with his caregivers play an important role in the further development of the parent-child relationship, Thompson said.

A key to that attachment, he said, is that parents help children process their emotions and interpret the actions of those around them.

"Responding to children with sensitive conversation shows you understand their point of view and helps them better understand others," he said.

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