

## Protect your Child's Emotional Well-Being

In our effort to balance very full and hectic lives with our families and our jobs, we may have been neglecting an all-important facet of our child's life: their emotional well-being. The first three years of a child's life is a critical time for a child, and the trauma of changing child care providers or having a 'part-time' parent float in and out of their life can be very traumatic and destabilizing for them. It's imperative that parents, educators, involved adults and care providers make a concerted joint effort to ensure that a child's emotional needs are met on a daily basis, just as their physical needs are. The effects of not meeting a child's emotional needs, especially during the first three years of life, can have devastating consequences. Violent, disruptive or defiant behaviors can result.

The first three years of life are critical in a number of ways. This is when bonding and emotional separation takes place. If there are interruptions in either of these processes, misbehaviors from the child can result. This can later have an affect on their relationships later in life and hinder them in developing their own healthy relationships as adolescents or adults.

During the first three years of life, the brain goes through its most rapid development ever, the likes of which will never been experienced again. By the time they are three years old, a child's brain is already 'hardwired' from the experiences they've had to that point. It's imperative that these be loving, supportive, safe, positive experiences so the brain will be conditioned to expect positive things. If they've been frightening, hurtful, abusive, or dangerous, then the brain is conditioned to expect negative occurrences.

Therefore it's critical that parents, caregivers and other involved adults make a concerted effort to make sure the child's emotional needs are met in a positive, constructive and healthy manner. Parents should ensure that the child's care providers are stable and consistent, and don't move them around to different childcare providers during this important phase. Ensure a child feels safe and secure with structured and consistent schedules and routines. Be sure to spend as much quality time with your child at this time as possible, regardless of your otherwise busy and hectic lifestyle. A child can sense that such a schedule is stressful to you and it can become a frightening or confusing element for them. Therefore it's important to take time out to reassure them that you're never too busy for them.

Remember that your child's emotional well-being is just as important as their physical, so do your part to ensure your child knows he's growing up safe, secure, treasured and loved.

