



Kym Cousins (B.AppSocSci Counselling major) is a counsellor at Accord Psychological and Counselling Services.

Kym works with individuals currently experiencing problems in their lives which have become too great to manage independently. Their concerns are often interrelated and can include grief, anxiety, depression, relationships and the effects of separation/divorce.

“My work as a midwife has also instilled a desire to assist women and their families to work through stressful or traumatic birth experiences and support them through post natal depression.

Attachment

The relationship that develops between a baby and their caregiver in the first few years of life is known as attachment. This is often confused with bonding or the feeling a mother develops for her child from the time she is aware of the first flutters of life developing in her womb.

A healthy attachment develops as a baby learns that their basic needs for warmth, security, food and love are met. Babies learn that when they cry (their main way of communicating for many months) someone will respond to their needs in a loving and caring manner, therefore reducing their levels of distress.

As their needs continue to be met by caregivers the baby learns that even when they have to wait a little longer for this to happen they are able to tolerate this with the knowledge that it will happen soon. Their self soothing and learning to trust enables them to begin exploring their world with the knowledge there is a secure base to return to. In this way children become more confident and able to explore their world, which then increases their knowledge and furthers their development.

One way that caregivers can support healthy attachment is by learning to be aware of the cues babies give about their readiness for interaction. Maintaining good eye contact from the moment of birth gives a connection between baby and caregiver, and when associated with pleasure and enjoyment from the caregiver, provides feelings of security for the baby.

Touch through stroking, cuddling or massaging helps soothe babies and small children when they are experiencing discomfort and anxiety. Talking about how the baby or small child might be feeling helps a child to understand and go on to name their feelings rather than acting them out. Staying with the child who is experiencing difficult feelings provides reassurance and develops trust where they realise that someone will be there through their pain and fear.

As a parent, showering your baby with love and kindness are basic ways of promoting an optimum environment to develop good attachment. This does not mean you have to be ‘perfect’ and in fact children will learn from realising everyone makes mistakes and there are ways of working through this rather than keeping it hidden. The aim is to provide a safe and comfortable loving environment for babies to develop into children and then adults who are able to give love and receive love in their own relationships.

It is not surprising that most of us parent the way we were parented, but it does not mean we have to parent the same way if it was not a good experience. Taking the most positive parts of our own experience and learning ways of improving the more negative ones may be the most positive thing for our children and our society that we do.