



The Hand You Hold

IS THE LEGACY YOU LEAVE

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our goal is healthy children

Acknowledgements

Childhood is the world of magical science and heartfelt miracles. Thank you to all of the parents and young children for teaching us and demonstrating that theories really do become realities. Together, we can build legacies.

The Hand You Hold is the Legacy You Leave was initially developed by the Yorkton KidsFirst Team with funds provided by KidsFirst Yorkton and the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education. In 2025, the Saskatchewan Prevention Institute and Yorkton KidsFirst collaborated to revise this resource.

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The Saskatchewan Prevention Institute is grateful for, and committed to, the opportunity to promote this resource throughout the province.

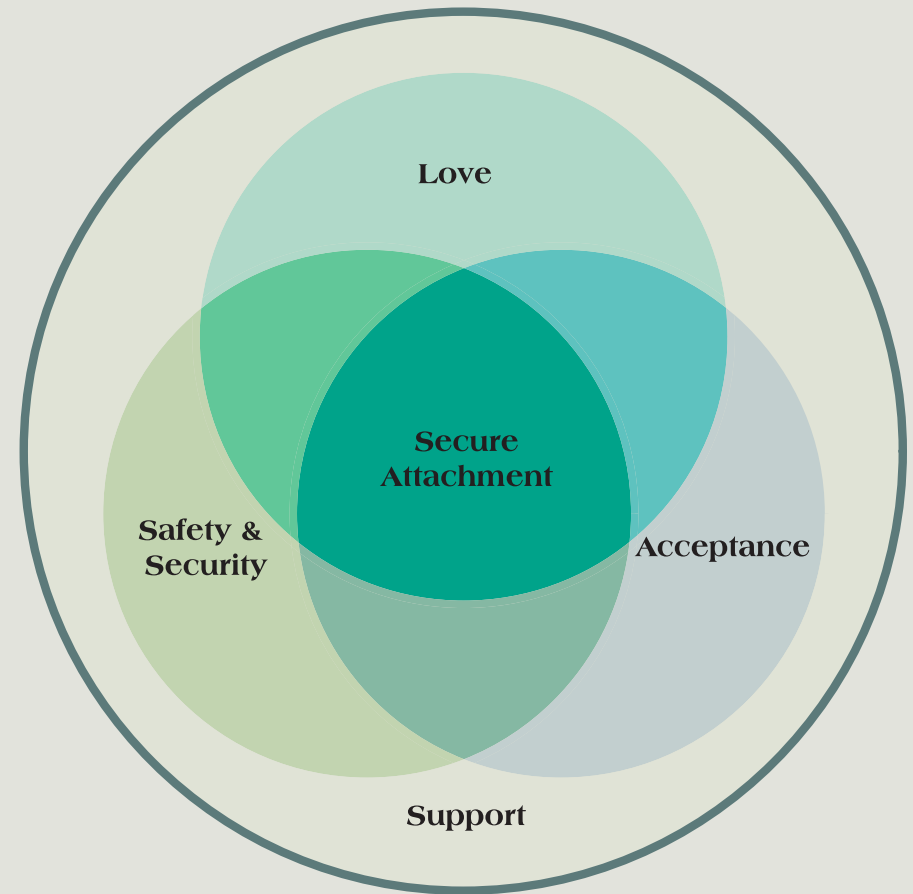


Foreword

The early nurturing environment of an infant has a big impact on how the child feels, thinks, and behaves as they grow. When a parent consistently provides comfort, safety, and positive interactions, their baby develops a secure attachment to them. This strong foundation fosters trust in others, healthier relationships, confidence to explore, resilience in handling stress, and improved problem-solving skills.

Understanding attachment relationships is a reminder that children have essential needs for *Love*, *Safety and Security*, and *Acceptance* that only a caring and responsive adult can provide. Parents and other caregivers provide the web of attachment relationships that a young child needs to thrive.

This book provides *Actions for Parents* to meet each of these essential needs and build secure attachment relationships with children. Related supporting *Research* is also provided.



Research

Positive and healthy attachment is one of the best predictors of positive outcomes later in life. It has the potential to last a lifetime and benefit future generations.

Love



*“Mommy, you are everything
I never knew I needed.”*

Love is essential for developing a secure attachment with a baby because it provides the foundation for trust, emotional security, and healthy development. When a parent consistently shows love, the baby feels safe and valued.

Actions For Parents

- Hold baby close so that your face and voice become their familiar comfort.
- Sing and talk to baby always. They can hear you and distinguish your voice even before they are born.
- Make eye contact.
- Show your baby how important they are to you.
- Remember that moments, either short or long, will be long lasting memories.

Research

Attachment is a relationship that goes back and forth between the child and parents and is key to healthy social and emotional development. When a parent can read the baby's cues and meet the child's needs in a consistent and loving manner, the child then responds with trust. This fosters healthy self-esteem and self-regulation. This becomes the foundation for later relationships.

Safety & Security



*“Mommy, I feel safe
in your arms.”*

When a parent responds to a baby's cries, smiles, or needs with care and attention, the baby feels safe and loved.

Actions For Parents

- Listen to what your baby is “saying” and then think, “What is baby trying to tell me?”
- Respond with warmth and care to your baby's cues (their facial expressions and body language). Taking care of your baby's needs right away will help your baby learn to trust that they are loved, safe, and secure.
- Comfort baby when they are upset. This will help them deal with big emotions as they grow.
- Be consistent. When you respond the same way each time, your baby learns they can count on you.

Research

When parents act in ways that are warm and accepting, it teaches the baby to trust that parents are available to meet their needs and signals. Babies learn that their parents are reliable and trustworthy and won't let them down. This is where babies learn to trust in others, and believe they matter and are safe.

Acceptance



*“Mom, when you talk to me,
you put a smile on my face.”*

When a parent shows acceptance, the baby learns that they are loved and valued regardless of their behaviour, abilities, or characteristics. This builds a foundation of trust where the child feels secure to explore the world knowing they have a safe base to return to.

Actions For Parents

- Play with your baby.
- Talk and sing with your baby. Your voice calms your baby.
- Be silly.
- Tell your baby about their world.
- Mirror your baby's actions and sounds.
- Show your baby love and care, even when they are crying.

Research

A baby communicates by crying or giving verbal and non-verbal cues (signals). They are trying to tell others something. They NEVER cry to make people mad. Ask, “What are they trying to tell me?” and “What are they feeling?” When parents respond with care and love, babies learn to trust and feel safe.

*“Yo amo cuando
sonries Mi amor.”*

*“I love when you
smile, my love.”*



Love

Touch is one of the first ways babies understand love - it soothes them when they cry, helps them sleep, and strengthens their bond with their parents. Through loving touch, babies learn that the world is a safe and caring place.

Actions For Parents

- Make touch part of your routine. Hands are for gentle and loving touch.
- Never hold a baby when you are angry.
- Kiss your baby.
- Hold your baby.
- Listen to your baby.

Research

New parents often ask, “Won’t holding our baby a lot or picking them up all the time, spoil them?” Experience and research have shown that the exact opposite is true. Responding to a baby’s cues and providing comfort through touch fosters independence. When babies needs are met consistently, they do not need to cry to get their parents to respond.

Safety & Security



“Grandpa, I don’t have words yet, but my smile says how much I love you.”

Babies thrive when they get love and care from many people. When a baby has strong, loving connections, they feel safe and supported. This helps them learn to trust others and feel secure in the world.

Actions For Parents

- Involve family members as they play an important role in a baby’s life.
- Teach family members about attachment relationships and how to best respond to your baby’s needs.
- Spend time outside in your community.
- Involve your community to help raise your baby.

Research

Supportive communities encourage positive early childhood development and create safe and stable environments where parents feel empowered.

Acceptance



*“I feel so much joy
when we play together.”*

Acceptance provides a foundation of safety and trust. Acceptance helps babies form a secure emotional bond, knowing they are valued for who they are. Play strengthens this bond by creating joyful, engaging interactions that build emotional connection and communication between babies and their caregivers.

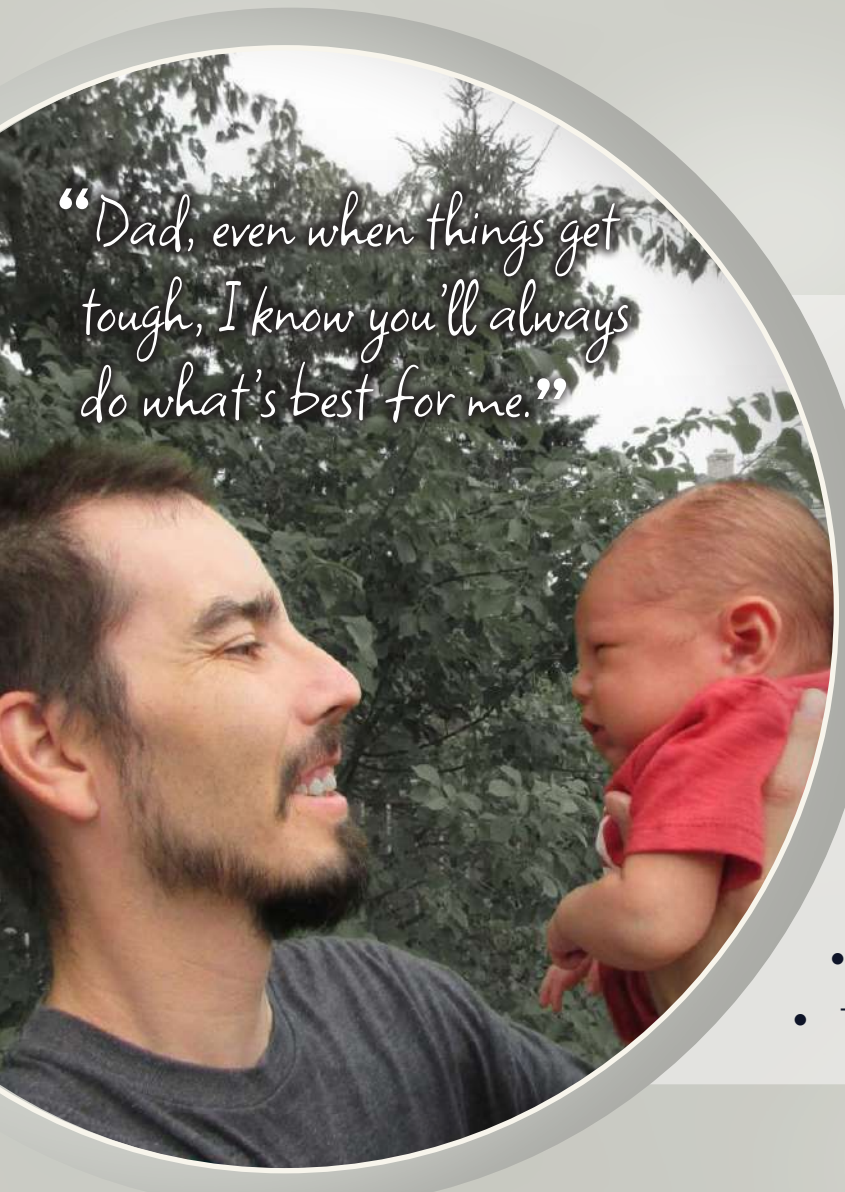
Actions For Parents

- Follow your child's lead in play.
- Interact through touch, sound, sight, and taste.
- Avoid overstimulation. Let your baby rest between play times. Learn your baby's cues for when they need to rest.

Research

Babies can play from birth. How that play looks will change over time as they mature, develop, and build necessary skills and movements. Play is the work of early childhood.

Support



“Dad, even when things get tough, I know you’ll always do what’s best for me.”

When parents take care of themselves, they are better able to respond to their baby’s needs with patience and sensitivity. Support from partners, family, friends, and professionals can help parents provide the care, comfort, and connection their baby needs.

Actions For Parents

- Be kind to yourself.
- Reduce stress as much as possible.
- Avoid smoking, alcohol, and drugs.
- Talk to others. Share how you are feeling.
- Connect with other new parents, your friends, and your family for support.
- Ask for help when you need it. Accept when people offer help.
- Talk with your healthcare providers about how you are feeling.

Research

Research shows that having strong social and parenting support helps parents feel more confident, reduces their stress, and leads to healthier child development.



“Dad, this is new for both of us. Showing up shows me how much you love me!”

Remember...

Healthy, loving, and supportive relationships between babies, parents, and other caregivers provide what babies need to grow and thrive.

A baby shows signs of secure attachment when they:

- seek comfort from their parent or primary caregiver when upset.
- explore their surroundings but check back with their parent.
- express a wide range of emotions comfortably.
- interact positively with others.

Support from partners, family, friends, and service providers is key for ensuring that parents and caregivers have the resources and encouragement they need to develop and maintain a secure, healthy attachment with their child.

If you have concerns about your child’s health and development, connect with a healthcare provider.

Research

Sensitive, responsive parenting is the single most important benefit children can receive during their early years.

**Celebrate parenthood by being involved, interactive, and positive.
Healthy attachment is a lifelong gift.**



**“Because you love me, support me, accept me, and make me feel safe,
the world is now open to me. Thank you. We did it together!”**

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