

# Growing the First Relationship into a Partnership.

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Successful intimate relationships are a doorway to health and happiness for human-beings. Not surprisingly, that first relationship that we make as new babies on this planet sets the scene for every other relationship which will follow. The quality of The First Relationship actually determines how the brain physically “wires up” the potential the new infant brings into the world. The First Relationship is the launching pad for the baby as a social being.

There are three factors vital to the success of any relationship, and when we have these three factors, consistently, we are pretty happy with our lot.

## **Full attention.**

You know how you feel when you are talking to someone and his attention is elsewhere, his mind is obviously in another place, he is not with you, at those times you know very clearly that you are not in relationship. You know that there is no partnership because your “partner” is not there.

That is also how it is for the baby. Changing the baby with your mind elsewhere, feeding the baby while you are planning the next day ... there are all sorts ways of being absent, and at the deepest level the baby knows it. The baby can't build the partnership with you because you are “not there”.

Paying full attention is one of the greatest skills that you can practise in any relationship. It is a gift of yourself to the Other in the interests of love and understanding. Starting on day one there are skills you can use to establish full attention in your partnership with your new baby.

Begin with eye contact. Yes, look into the baby's eyes so that she sees your presence. Gently touch the child so that she feels your presence. Speak your baby's name, it lets her know that you are there, and that something is about to happen. There are no surprises for your baby now.

## **“With” and not “to”.**

You and I wouldn't do anything “to” an adult without first telling them and preparing them, and we're certainly not keen on anyone doing anything “to” us unannounced. Doing things “to” people is disrespectful (and hardly partnership), yet it is surprising how often we unwittingly do things “to” babies as if they were objects and not sensitive sentient beings.

A habit to start on day one with your new baby is speaking to him, telling him what you intend and what is about to happen. Everything. You might say “I am going to put my hand under your head now” - and you wait so the baby has time to take that in. “I am going to pick you up now” - and then you wait a moment - and then you pick him up.

To begin with, this may feel strange. It's a little bit like talking to the cat, telling it that its dinner is coming. Like the cat, it isn't long before your baby, decoding the communications you are giving, begins to successfully anticipate what is coming next. In a relationship, when you can anticipate what is about to happen you can participate in the happening. When you can participate, the partnership is born. Babies demonstrate partnership at a surprisingly early age when they are treated as partners.

The other great bonus of talking with your baby about “every little thing” as it is about to happen, is that this practice is full attention in action, it keeps you in the present moment with your child. This full attention has another payoff for you the parent. Somehow, practicing full attention when changing, dressing, bathing and feeding “fills the baby's emotional-needs-tank.” The baby is

happy to have some play time on their own, discovering what it is to be a body in this world. This “free-to-play-on-their-own-terms-time” leaves you time to do what you need to do.

## **Trust**

These two simple practices build trust. Trust in a relationship is very definitely a two way street, and this is true of the relationship you and your baby are building together. The baby gets to trust you to be respectful, to treat her as a full partner. When you slow down and go gently, you have the chance to get to know her cues, her own unique communication with you. Because you have slowed down she has the time to process and get to know your cues, your communication with her. The baby builds her trust in you and in the world as a safe place, while you build your trust in the capability of your baby and in your capability as the partner called “parent.”

This trust is the basis of your allowing your child to unfold in his own good time. Just as a rose grows from a tiny bud to a full-blown rose without help or interference, so too will your baby unfold perfectly without help or interference. Of course your baby needs your support but babies will unfold physically, as designed, without your help or interference. One of the ways that you support this unfolding is allowing free movement. Free movement means never putting babies into any position that they cannot get into or out of by themselves. The baby has to be free to follow the impulses their growing body has to exercise just the right muscles in just the right order to blossom as a balanced and capable human being, literally. And for your new baby that means spending his playtime on his back so that he can get control of his balance by exercising. Your baby can't do this stuck propped up with pillows, or in all the commercial gadgets ranging from highchairs, walker-saucers to bouncing-jumping restraints. The only time your baby needs to be restrained is in the car-seat when the car is going.

So it's pretty simple really - but then all the profound things are. Love your baby by practicing full attention to grow the partnership. Do everything with your baby and not to your baby. Trust yourself and your baby to be able to grow this close partnership, and trust in the design of this miracle that is your baby, and in the parent that you are.

Pennie Brownlee