



how mom & dad can **love and** **respond to baby**

what is nurturing care?

Nurturing care is what all children need to thrive. It is defined as a stable environment that is sensitive to children's health and nutritional needs, and that provides protection from harm, opportunities for early learning, and interactions that are responsive, emotionally supportive, and developmentally stimulating. These environments offer acceptance and a sense of belonging and connection demonstrated through an active and constant relationship with the child or adolescent (Berry & Malek, p52. 2017).¹

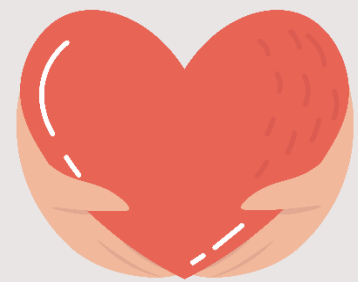


(WHO, 2018)

what is responsive caregiving?

Responsive caregiving (or love) is one of the components of the nurturing care framework. It includes observing and responding to children's movements, sounds and gestures and verbal requests. It is the basis for all the other components like:

- Protecting children against injury & the negative effects of adversity (**security and safety**)
- Recognizing & responding to illness (**good health**)
- Enriched learning (**opportunities for early learning**)
- Building trust & social relationships
- Responsive feeding, especially for low-weight or ill infants (**adequate nutrition**)



“The most important ingredient in a child’s life is the people.”

Before young children learn to speak, the engagement between them and their caregivers is expressed through cuddling, eye contact, smiles, vocalizations, and gestures. These mutually enjoyable interactions create an emotional bond, which helps young children to understand the world around them and to learn about people, relationships, and language. These social interactions also stimulate connections in the brain (WHO, p17. 2018).

Responsive caregiving is shown by:

- The child having secure emotional relations with caregivers,
- Caregivers being sensitive and responsive to the child's cues,
- Caregiver-child interactions being enjoyable and stimulating,
- Communication being two-directional.

The greatest of these is love...

By **LOVE** we mean that this baby is welcomed with warmth and care into a relationship with mom and family. Love means that mom always keeps baby in mind, listens, responds, and attends to baby's needs gently as needed. Mom communicates love through her voice, touch, gaze, and attention to her baby's needs (hunger, tiredness, discomfort, need for comfort). Her care is communicated in direct response to communication from her baby. Isn't that beautiful!

Love is a key ingredient and a basic need for all children. God has wired us to be loved and to show love.

love and responsive giving

Babies and young children need love to grow. This loving bond is vitally important for the healthy development of the child. Children are completely dependent on their parents to recognise and respond to their needs. These needs are not only for nutrition and safety, but also for social engagements, cognitive stimulation, emotional regulation and soothing.

Effective caregivers observe their child's cues, interpret what the child wants and needs, and **respond consistently and appropriately**. Before baby can speak - they cry. This is how they communicate. The baby's cry generally tells us that something is wrong, or there is a need like baby is tired or needs to be held or needs food. **By being curious**

and observing or noticing, parents can learn to recognise and get to know what baby is communicating about their needs. Then parents can respond accordingly. This will take practice for a new mom or dad.

Learning to recognise the signals or cues is important and it strengthens the bond between baby and caregiver. The more mom and dad are curious about their baby - they can learn to read baby signals like distress, crying, screaming, discomfort, turning away, making noise before the crying, niggly or fussing, hiccups. By knowing what each sound could mean, mom/dad will know when something is wrong and be able to respond by going to the clinic or doctor. These are **signs that the child maybe sick** and needs medical attention. Babies also can cry when feeling overwhelmed by all the sights and sounds of the world — or for no clear reason at all. Babies also use sounds, their voice, their bodies movements, their face and facial expressions, arms, and leg to communicate.

“Infants do better when they signal to us, and we respond to those signals”



It is important to remember that **babies cannot be spoiled with too much attention, and they are not being naughty.** And so, it is important to always respond when baby cries. Quick responses to their signals or cries let them know that they are safe and cared for.

When a parent responds to their baby's cues an emotional bond forms. This also helps the baby to understand the world around them and learn about people, relationships and language. These social interactions also stimulate brain development and **help the child to feel loved, safe, and secure.**

Caregivers provide the foundation for all early learning when they make eye contact with their young child, follow their child's gaze, and talk to the child, taking turns. When caregivers are sensitive, responsive, predictable, and loving, they facilitate the child's early social and emotional development, promote secure emotional attachment between the infant and parent, and help their child to learn.

The opposite of this is ignoring the signals and cues or delaying responding. When a baby is in distress and crying next and parent ignores this and continues as if nothing is happening. This is not helping the child feel safe and the child learns to not trust the environment or trust that their needs will be met. If this is the normal pattern of behaviour in the household the child will develop an insecure bond filled with mistrust.



Video: Why does responsiveness matter?

The Beginning of Life

Bernard van Leer Foundation

What can a parent do?

Having heard all this – a parent can show love and respond to baby by:

- cuddling, making eye contact, smiling, vocalising, and gesturing to show attention
- being sensitive and responsive to the child's cues
- when baby cries – respond in a healthy way by turning to baby and seeing what is wrong (check for hunger, tiredness, nappy change etc)
- responding before baby starts to show stronger cues of distress by crying, niggly or fussing, hiccups
- listening and getting to know baby – to know what noise means what
- making the parent-child interactions enjoyable and stimulating for both parties
- making sure communication is two-directional
- welcoming baby with warmth – not irritation or ignoring baby's cues
- Using love in the tone of voice, no raised voices or any words – the tone and words used are positive, happy and full of love

useful resources

- Video: [What do children need to thrive? All children need nurturing care.](#)
- Video: [Why does responsiveness matter?](#)
- Video: [Why a mother's love is paramount](#)
- Website: [Nurturing Care: for early childhood development](#)

1 Corinthians 13: 4-7

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”