

Building Secure Attachment with Your Child

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Building healthy attachment with your children is vital to their overall development and also to the relationship you form with them. As they grow up they form what is called an attachment style. John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth were pioneers in the research of attachment theory. While early research and findings were presented in terms of early childhood, researchers through the years have expanded the research into adults and adult relationships. Attachment science is in line with current research from the fields of neuroscience, social psychology, health psychology, and clinical psychology. The core message of all these fields is that human beings are first and foremost social, relational, and a bonding species. Our need for connection with others shapes our neurological chemistry, responses to stress, emotional lives, and interpersonal issues. Building a healthy attachment with your children will set them up for healthy

emotional regulation, and healthy relationship bonds in their future.

What is an Attachment Style?

You may not think too much about your attachment style, or perhaps you do not realize you have an attachment style. The truth is, attachment styles are formed from the very first relationships we encounter and can vary and change over the course of one's life. The four basic styles of attachment are; secure attachment, anxious attachment, avoidant attachment, and anxious-avoidant attachment.

Securely attached individuals are comfortable with closeness and their need for others. They reach out to their attachment figures (parents) when they are in need, through bids for the parent to make or maintain contact. When the parent consistently responds, trust is reinforced, and the nervous system is calmed in

the child. Predictable emotional and physical connection with an attachment figure calms the nervous system and helps the brain develop a sense of "safe haven". Children with secure attachment have better tuned nervous systems. They will be less sensitive to threat and can see the world as relatively safe and manageable. Emotional balance promotes the development of a positive sense of self, healthy self esteem, and healthy communication habits.

If attachment figures have been consistently inaccessible or unresponsive when needed, then anxious and avoidant attachment styles develop within the child. Within anxious attachment, a child is sensitive to negative messages and have more "fight" responses designed to protest the distance and to attempt to make the attachment figure pay more attention and give more reassuring support. They need constant reassurance and have a harder time trusting others. Within avoidant attachment, a child distances themselves when they feel the attachment figure is uncaring or consistently unavailable. This then minimizes the child's attachment needs, and they become self-reliant.

Vulnerability then becomes harder and triggers distancing behaviors. Within all relationships fight and flight behaviors are present at times, however they can become generalized and habitual, becoming the attachment style and then constrains one's awareness

and limits their ability to constructively engage with others.

How to Build Secure Attachment

The key ingredients for secure attachment in children are constant and reliable accessibility, responsiveness, and emotional engagement from attachment figures. Basically, your child will need to be able to rely on you, trust you, and feel worthy of your love. Shared vulnerability is essential. Sharing in vulnerability with your child will build bonds and a mutual trust. Talking with your child, accepting and addressing their emotional needs, hearing and considering their opinions, and apologizing when necessary all are practices in vulnerability. Activities which build secure attachment involve eye-contact, physical touch, and emotional care.



Michaela Wheat, MS, MFTA works in New Leaf's Crown Point and Wheatfield offices

Looking for ways to build attachment with your child?

See page 3 for ideas!

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Our Mission
New Leaf Resources promotes healthy relationships and personal growth through counseling, education, and consultation from a Christian perspective.

“There Is Indeed Help and Hope...”

Corky DeBoer, Executive Director



Since writing this column for our last newsletter, so much has changed. Change is never easy and these past few months have brought so much change! Every one of us have been impacted in one way or another by the COVID-19 pandemic.

There have been changes in school life, in church life, in work life and in our family and social life. The routine, face to face contact with family and friends, which was simply taken for granted, came to a screeching halt as “shelter-in-place” orders were given. Teachers, pastors, employers and administrators were all challenged with how to carry out their mission in the midst of such change.

New Leaf’s annual celebration event couldn’t be held this spring, and everyone has most likely experienced the interruption of other celebrations ---of birthdays, anniversaries, graduations.

Additional stress has been felt when we are unable to visit loved ones who are hospitalized or when times of mourning have been curtailed as visitation and other cultural expressions of caring and support are greatly restricted. On and on the list could go.

In the midst of so much change, the good news is that people have been coming together to create ways to address these new challenges. I am so grateful to the New Leaf team (staff, board members and supporters) who have collectively assisted us during these challenging times.

This collective effort can be seen

in a couple of changes that New Leaf has implemented in order to continue to best serve individuals, families, churches and our community in the midst of this pandemic. One of these changes was the introduction of telehealth. Within a week of the “shelter-in-place” orders, we were able to safely continue our ministry by implementing counseling sessions through a HIPAA compliant video platform.

Another resource we were able to develop and provide was the COVID-19 resource page on our website <https://www.newleafresources.org/covid19.cfm> I encourage you to tap into this resource, as you will find a wealth of practical tips and support to assist you and those you love.

The need for mental health services will continue to rise as a result of the increased stressors we have experienced.

In a March 25 article entitled, “The next pandemic will be in mental health” psychiatrist Najma Hamdani wrote:

“We are all grieving, and we need to let that sink in. We must support each other, let each other cry, and lean on each other emotionally. The only way out of this maze is through the twisting walls of grief, loss, sadness, and vulnerability. We all must be willing to brave through this maze together!Through our collective grief and vulnerability, we will emerge as more grateful, mindful, and appreciative.”

In Ecclesiastes 4 you will find these words of wisdom, which speak clearly of our interdependence on God and one another, and the importance of collectively being there for one another in times of need:

“Two are better than one..... If either of them falls down, one can help the other up.... Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.”

Here are some specific ways that you can collectively partner with us in providing the needed counseling services in the midst of this pandemic and its aftermath:

* **Pray** that God will send more Christian therapists to join our team, as the need in the months to come will be greater than ever.

* **Pray** for the health of our ministry team and their loved ones. Several have been ill and are facing their own challenges as a result of the pandemic.

* **Pray** for discernment for New Leaf as we continue to explore how we can best be used by God to bring help, hope, and healing to individuals, families, churches and our community (including those who have been on the front lines of the pandemic—police, firemen, EMT, health care workers).

* **Give** generously. Some are giving all or a portion of their \$1,200 stimulus checks to support ministries like New Leaf. Here are a couple of ways your generous giving will be a blessing:

- We need to furnish three more therapists’ offices at \$25,000 so that more therapists can be hired and provide the essential services.
- Additional monies are needed for our Marty Doot Client Assistance Fund. Each year, \$125,000 - \$150,000 is required to provide therapy services to those who do not have insurance or are unable to pay the portion that insurance does not cover.

Thank you for your ongoing interest in and support of New Leaf Resources. We are facing a time of great need for mental health services from a Christian perspective. Through your prayers and generous support, the healing touch of God will continue to be experienced by many. “A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.”

New Therapist Caryn Johnson

New Leaf is proud to welcome a new therapist, Caryn Johnson to its staff.

Caryn Johnson, MA, LCPC is an Adult and Adolescent Therapist who works in New Leaf's Lansing office. Her areas of interest include depression, anxiety, mood disorders including bipolar, stress management, adjustment issues, and self-esteem.

Caryn Johnson comes to New Leaf with a Master of Arts degree in Counseling from Governor's State University and is licensed as a Clinical Professional Counselor.

Previously, Caryn worked in outpatient community mental health and mental health residential and acute mental health settings.

In her free time, Caryn enjoys spending time with her family and friends, going to the movies, photography, reading, and visiting surrounding cities and state parks.

Caryn is seeing new clients. If you are interested in scheduling a session with Caryn, contact New Leaf at (708) 895-7310



New Leaf's Caryn Johnson



New Office Administrator Lisa Dittrich-Bondor



We are so excited to announce Lisa Dittrich-Bonder joined New Leaf's staff last month as Office Administrator. "I was drawn to New Leaf because of its mission and a desire to help people," she explains. "I am more excited to be at New Leaf after meeting all of the staff and speaking with the clients!"

In her new position in New Leaf's Lansing office, Lisa will be managing all of the many details that go into New Leaf's office and administration. She comes to New Leaf with a great deal of experience and knowledge of finance, human resources, and operational management as well as an easy going attitude and a desire to help others succeed. We're certain she'll be a great fit!

Lisa lives in Northwest Indiana with her husband and enjoys reading, puzzles, and traveling in her free time.



Attachment Building Ideas



Activity Ideas:

- * Cuddling, hugs, secret handshakes, back scratches and other appropriate touch oriented activities.
- * Get on the child's level to talk with them.
- * Read stories together.
- * Have a staring contest.
- * Comb each other's hair.
- * Draw portraits of each other.
- * Play together. Let your child direct the play and be open to seeing play as their way of communicating with you.
- * Make up dances to their favorite songs.
- * Peek-a-boo, cooing, and singing to infants and toddlers.
- * Play board games or card games. Perhaps plan a regular game night.
- * Bake or cook together.
- * Do tuck-ins at bedtime.

What you can do:

- * Learn your child's interests and get involved with them.
- * Be aware of your tone of voice. Involve both parents in this process.
- * Maintain daily routines and keep consistency with your child.
- * Validate your child's emotions (both negative and positive).
- * Remain emotionally and physically present.
- * Comfort your child when they are distressed.
- * Take care of your own emotional, mental, and physical needs. * You must be able to model healthy attachment and emotional regulation within your other relationships.

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

The uncertainty caused by COVID-19 is difficult for all but it's especially challenging for those already struggling with anxiety, depression, relationship issues, & other mental health challenges.

New Leaf's therapists are here to help. Call us at (708) 895-7310 to schedule an appointment today.

Additional resources can be found at www.newleafresources.org/covid19.cfm

A Fond Farewell

Over the past months, New Leaf has bid a fond farewell to staff members **Margie Clark, Kass Cooper, Diane Emmanuelson, and Tonya Moore.**

We wish them God's blessings and all of the best in their future endeavors!

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New Leaf Resources is...

A **professional mental health agency** which provides counseling and consultation services to individuals, families, couples, children, churches, schools and businesses.

A **ministry** which brings the best possible care to those we serve, striving to reflect God's grace and love to all who seek help.

A **community resource** offering educational services, prevention programs, training, support and coaching.

