

The Special Relationship between a Mother and Her Child

A child is in need of care and nurture in order to physically, emotionally, cognitively and socially develop. In the social system of traditional families, both parents are involved in raising and fostering the child. However, mothers tend to be the primary caregivers that uniquely influence their child's growth.

The relationship between a mother and her child starts to develop during pregnancy. The bonding begins around 18 to 25 weeks, when a mother starts to feel the fetus moving and can see her baby during an ultrasound scan. Correspondingly, the developing fetus is able to find security and safety when hearing the mother's heartbeats and voice. Around two-thirds of women testify a strong relationship with their child by the seventh month of pregnancy.

The trust in the maternal bond greatly adds up when the mother and child are brought together during delivery. During the first precious hours and days of the infant's birth, the mother is in constant physical contact with her baby either by breastfeeding or by simply holding them close to her chest. The intimate mother-child moments after birth help establish long lasting bonds and attachment.

The immediate contact between the mother and child after birth is often absent. Physical distance can be created due to delivery complications or the birth of a premature baby that requires medical treatment. However, this temporary physical distance does not dictate that no mother-child bonding will occur. As a result, mothers should not feel pressures to bond instantly with their infants because there is plenty of bonding time in the child's future months of development.

The first months after birth, the mother-child relationship is fostered by the long watching of the child and the contact with the mother's skin. Breastfeeding also strongly encourages maternal bonding through touch, response and mutual gazing. During these early periods, mothers become sensitive to hormonal and psychological motivations that attach them more to their child's needs and security.

The physical care such as food, clothing, rest and medical care seem to be the easiest for mothers to take care of. However, providing a warm, secure, and accepting atmosphere for the upbringing of a child is the trickiest task. Children respond to the love of parents by showing attachment to them. The quality of this attachment highlights the quality of the maternal bond that will influence the child's entire development.

The mother-child relationship seems to be inseparable and resistant during the first periods of life. The mother plays an essential role in stimulating and inducing her child's social and adaptive behaviors. The stimulation of the child's social behavior can occur through communication. At early ages, mothers talk and address their child assuming as if they are a true interlocutor. These communication intentions help the baby's sensory and perceptual abilities to develop despite the child's lack of intentions to communicate at around two months of age.

Children, after the age of two months, are able to respond to the communication intentions initiated by the environment by smiling. Only after the age of six months does the child develop resources that allow interpersonal non-verbal communication behaviors. Before developing verbal communication, a child is able to understand the meaning of words. Around the age of one year, the mother plays a critical role in helping the child learn verbal language which is also known as "mother tongue".

In addition to the social development, a mother's relationship with her child is important for the child's emotional growth. Research shows that an insecure maternal relationship leads to more behavioral problems in later childhood, especially in boys. Children with insecure attachments have a higher vulnerability to show discouragement, rejection, aggression or hostility.

A healthy mother-child relationship is one that offers the child security, acceptance, love, nurture and learning. Those special mommy lullabies, kissing boo-boos, sleepless nights when the child is sick and even changing diapers are all part of developing a strong maternal bond. The biggest challenge a woman may ever have is keeping up with the demands of being a mother. However, the reward of forever respect, love and honor from the child is enough to overcome the challenges!

Remy Elias
Psychologist
www.nawfalclinics.com