

# All About Attachment Parenting



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From the moment you lay eyes on your new baby, there's a shift in your life's purpose. One day your weekend schedule is packed full of adventurous solo trips, self-care, and dates, and the next, you're

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new bambino's every coo. (Side note: Remember to continue taking care of you, too!)

After those blurry first few weeks (or months) of sleepless nights, jaw-dropping blowouts, and around-the-clock **feeding sessions**, you might finally be coming up for air to decide how you're going to supermom (or superdad) this parenting thing with a style that fits your beliefs and family dynamic.

## Parenting isn't one-size-fits-all

While you might feel a lot of pressure to pick *one* style, the comforting reality is this: In an instant, you become a parent, but the act of parenting is a true journey. Discovering what parenting approach you want to adopt can take time to figure out.

Once more, there's no one-size-fits-all approach. Your parenting style can change based on the evolving needs of your family ecosystem.

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We're going to take a closer look at the attachment parenting philosophy, but feel empowered to create your *own* parenting style that ebbs and flows. Keep in mind that we emphasize adopting evidence-based practices that promote the utmost health and safety of your pride and joy.

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## What is attachment parenting?

Attachment parenting is a modern parenting philosophy based on the attachment theory, which was coined by the work of two child psychologists. This [research-supported theory](#) is based on the concept that a parent's connection and responsiveness to their baby's needs have an everlasting effect on their baby's future emotional health and relationships.

Attachment parenting takes this a few steps further. It emphasizes forming physical and emotional infant-parent bonds through designated "tools." These tools are designed to promote maximal empathy, responsiveness, and physical touch.

The belief is that this approach will foster both parent and child confidence. This is because the parent learns to appropriately identify and respond to their baby's signals, and baby feels assured that their needs will be met.

## Basic principles of attachment parenting

While every loving parent aims to be attentive, the division between parenting styles is all in the "how." Below, we cover the basic how-to tools (called the "Baby B's") that guide attachment parenting.

As you read these, consider that you can identify with one tool but not others. And if there's a tool you're uncomfortable with — as some don't entirely align with the current American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommendations — we strongly encourage you to talk to your pediatrician about it to ensure your baby's safety.

### Birth bonding

Attachment parenting views the initial bonding between mothers/fathers and baby immediately after birth — and up to the first 6 weeks — as a

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The approach promotes skin-to-skin contact and constant togetherness between parent and baby with a high level of infant nurturing from the mother especially, using the tools discussed below.

## Breastfeeding

With attachment parenting, [breastfeeding](#) is viewed as an essential way to healthfully nurture and soothe your baby. It promotes physical touch and opportunities to respond to your baby's hunger cues. Breastfeeding also triggers a mother's body to release hormones that may potentially boost mothering instincts.

### Our position: Fed is best

Mamas, hear us out: We know breastfeeding can be emotionally and physically taxing. There are times when new moms want to breastfeed but can't for *many* valid reasons, and other moms who choose not to breastfeed for very authentic reasons, too.

While science and the attachment parenting style support [breastfeeding as the best source of nutrition for infants](#) ✓, your baby's source of nutrition and mother-baby bonding can flourish through other feeding methods. Breastfeeding is such a personal choice that can be driven by what allows you and your baby to *both* thrive.

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## Baby wearing

You've likely seen every type of wrap, sling, and what have you — so what's all the hype about [baby wearing](#)? With the attachment parenting philosophy, baby wearing promotes physical closeness and trust between the baby and their caregiver. While worn, babies can also safely learn about their environment, and parents can symbiotically learn about their

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## Bed-sharing

This might be the most controversial of the attachment parenting tools. In this approach, bed-sharing is thought to reduce a baby's [separation anxiety](#) at night and make nighttime breastfeeding easier for mom.

However, there's a strong body of research noting the serious risks involved in co-sleeping, including [sudden infant death syndrome \(SIDS\)](#), suffocation, oxygen deprivation, and being caught in the covers or unintentionally entrapped by the caregiver while sleeping.

### Our position: Safety first

In conflict with the bed-sharing recommendations of attachment parenting, the [Safe Sleep Guidelines](#) released by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommend sleeping in the same room as your baby for at least 6 months and up to 1 year, but on separate sleeping surfaces. In fact, the AAP states that *room-sharing* can decrease the risk of SIDS by 50 percent (but *bed-sharing* can increase it).

Additional safe sleep recommendations from the AAP include:

- positioning your baby to sleep on their back on a firm surface
- using tight-fitting sheets in a bare crib with no soft bedding, blankets, toys, or pillows
- protecting your baby from exposure to smoke, alcohol, and illicit drugs
- offering a [pacifier](#) at nap and bedtime (this one also conflicts with attachment parenting recommendations, which state pacifiers can interfere with breastfeeding)

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In attachment parenting, a baby's cries are viewed as their way of communicating a need — not as a form of manipulation. Attachment parents are quick to sensitively respond to their baby's every cry to foster growing infant-caregiver trust and learn their baby's communication style.

## Balance and boundaries

Parenthood can be compared to being the circus ringleader. One minute you have the elephants marching in a row, and in a split second, they're melting down in pure chaos for peanuts.

So the concept of balance is a tough expectation to meet 100 percent of the time, especially in the early days of parenting an infant (and throughout the emotionally turbulent toddler years). This is because you're constantly trying to find the new equilibrium between meeting the evolving needs of your baby, you, your partner, and all your other relationships and responsibilities. Your status update? *It's complicated.*

At its core, attachment parenting encourages tuning into your baby, yourself, and the needs of others in your family ecosystem. It hones in on finding ways to calmly and appropriately respond (yes *or* no) and even [ask for help](#) when you need it (yep — that one's not easy, either).

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## Attachment parenting infants (birth to age 1)

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techniques that create more infant-parent independence and stricter schedules for feeding and sleeping.

In attachment parenting, however, babies' cries are seen as their communication tool, which allows the *baby* to guide these needs rather than the parent asserting them.

You'll see this theme in the following examples of what attachment parenting techniques might look like from birth to age 1.

## Birth

- Skin-to-skin contact and physical bonding between mother and baby begin immediately after birth.
- Breastfeeding starts as soon as possible after birth.
- Mom and dad hold their new baby often.
- Parents begin listening to their baby's cries and signals to learn cues, temperament, and needs.
- Mom establishes breastfeeding with an on-demand feeding schedule.
- Pacifiers are avoided for soothing and breastfeeding is offered instead.

## 0 to 12 months

- Parents hold and wear baby often with a [safe baby carrier](#).
- Mom lets baby direct when feedings occur, encouraging frequent breastfeeding.
- Parents answer baby's cries quickly and attend to all needs with sensitivity.
- Parents study baby's behavior, facial expressions, and patterns to build instinctive knowledge about baby's health, temperament, and needs.

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- Parental approach emphasizes empathy toward baby's outbursts or negative emotions.
- Pacifiers are still avoided.

## Attachment parenting toddlers

Attachment parenting in toddlers carries through the same parent-child connection principles. But the tools change as baby transitions into this more autonomous (and boisterous) phase of development.

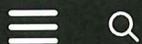
The style is still predominantly child-guided, and it's recommended to keep an open time frame for weaning tools, including those related to co-sleeping and breastfeeding, based on the child's signs of readiness.

The attachment parenting style in toddlerhood will look different for each family. However, here are some general ways the principles might be approached with your toddler.

- Breastfeeding may continue past age 1 and **wean slowly** as directed by the child's cues.
- Parental empathy guides responding to the child's needs.
- Parents validate (and don't brush off or scold) a child's negative emotions (fear, anger, and frustration) that may be tied to an unfavorable behavior (crying, tantrums, throwing, and hitting).
- Co-sleeping continues until guided by the child's readiness for independent sleeping.
- Parents encourage touch with toddler carriers, cuddling, and physical closeness.
- Parents allow the child to be autonomous and make decisions when safe and appropriate.
- Discipline is done with gentle guidance and positive reinforcement rather than strict or harsh punishment.

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published in 2012, breastfeeding is recommended exclusively for up to 6 months and continued with solids for up to 1 year or longer.

Additionally, one surprising benefit of this parenting style was described in a [2019 meta-analysis](#). It showed that children with parents who were in tune with and attentive to their emotional and physical needs were over two times more likely to develop better language skills than children who did not experience this style.

Learning the skill of emotional regulation may be another pro of attachment parenting. This [2010 article](#) concluded that infants exposed to a highly responsive parenting style cry less, showing less distress. What's more, older infants and children influenced by responsive parenting were noted to better regulate emotions such as fear, anger, and distress.

In turn, this reduces their exposure to stress, which can positively affect brain development and the ability to cope with stress later in life.

## Cons of attachment parenting

The most important and potentially very serious con of attachment parenting surrounds bed-sharing. As we've discussed, the risk of suffocation and SIDS is higher with co-sleeping than it is with room-sharing, a practice in which the baby is placed in a separate and secure sleeping space within the same room.

And while the effects are not documented by much research, implementing the attachment parenting tools can be very physically and emotionally demanding on the parent (traditionally, the breastfeeding mother) or primary caregiver.

The on-demand breastfeeding and constant physical closeness emphasized in this approach may limit a mother's ability to establish her

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the attachment parenting tools might not jive well with some families' lives.

## The takeaway

Bringing a new baby into your life can rock your world in so many ways. And we know **mom guilt** is real, so when approaching parenting styles, read through several to learn strategies that align with your beliefs, life, goals, and family dynamic.

It seems the most compelling long-term benefit of attachment parenting is building a responsive parenting style that continues to meet your child's physical and emotional needs through a sensitive and empathetic approach.

And while the benefits of breastfeeding are well known, it's such an individual decision for each new mama. Most importantly, take caution with co-sleeping. We recommend discussing safe sleeping guidelines with your child's pediatrician before implementing this attachment parenting tool.

If you're interested in learning more about attachment parenting, here are a few books to check out.

- [Attachment Parenting: Instinctive Care for Your Baby and Young Child](#) by Katie Allison Granju and Betsy Kennedy
- [Beyond the Sling: A Real-Life Guide to Raising Confident, Loving Children the Attachment Parenting Way](#) by Mayim Bialik
- [Modern Attachment Parenting: The Comprehensive Guide to Raising a Secure Child](#) by Jamie Grumet

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You may think there's only one type of parenting. But according to parenting theorists, there are actually several different styles of parenting. One theorist came up with eight different styles of parenting, and of those, there are three that are most common in today's modern-parenting: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive.

Let's take a look at the different types of parenting and their pros and cons.

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## The three types of parenting

### Permissive parenting

This style of parenting has very few rules and expectations of children. Most times, the parents are loving and express caring about their children, but they don't see their children as mature or capable enough to carry out certain tasks or responsibilities that require self-control.

Permissive parents rarely discipline their children. They avoid confrontation whenever possible. Instead of setting rules and expectations or trying to prevent problems from happening, they choose to instead let children figure things out for themselves.

### Authoritarian parenting

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children. Rules are strict, punishments are swift, and disciplinary measures are harsh. Obedience is expected.

Authoritarian parenting is mostly about demanding complete control and obedience from a child and doling out sometimes harsh punishment if the rules aren't followed.

## Authoritative parenting

This type of parenting can be thought of as a balance between the two more extreme styles of parenting. Leading psychologist Dr. Baumrind, who developed the [theories of parenting styles](#) in the late 1960s, believes this style of parenting is the most "proper" because it balances respecting a child's personality while allowing the parent to remain intimate and close with their child.

Authoritative parents set rules and expectations for their children but also respond more thoughtfully and lovingly to them. They practice discipline but also provide feedback. They listen more and discuss consequences and expected behavior.

They're supportive in their efforts and display a mixture of letting children learn while guiding them respectfully. Authoritative parents provide healthy guidelines that let children experience the world in a safe and loving way.

## How does it affect children?

Many studies have found that permissive parenting is actually linked to problems in children, like poor academic performance and behavioral problems. For example, [one study found](#) that children as young as 4 years old tend to internalize problems more when they're exposed to permissive parenting. In contrast, children who have more authoritative parenting styles display less signs of internalizing behavior.

Permissive parenting has also been linked to more risky behaviors in

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problems as young adults. Children with permissive parents also report less intimacy with their parents.

The authoritative parenting style has been linked to some positive aspects in young children and adolescents. An [older study](#) from 1989 shows it helps with psychosocial maturity, cooperation with peers and adults, responsible independence, and academic success. Children also report having more intimate relationships with their parents when an authoritative parenting style is used.

However, there are different levels of permissive parenting styles. Some [research](#) has been conflicted about just how “bad” permissive parenting is. For instance, a parent may be permissive on some things — like how much television their child watches in the summer — and more firm on other aspects. Race, income, and education all play a role in the different types of parenting styles as well.

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## Takeaway

While three main types of parenting styles have been identified, parenting does come in many different shapes and forms. Studies seem to suggest the most extreme types of parenting are “permissive” parenting, with very few rules or expectations of children, and “authoritarian” parenting, with demands of total obedience.

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