

C. Bonding

"Today, women are having terrible difficulties in parenting and in knowing how to parent . . . Therefore, we need those moments that nature gives us, in a sense, to become attached to our infants, to become better mothers, to become more sensitive in relation to infants. It does not mean it won't happen on day three, or two weeks hence; . . ."³⁰

59. Almost immediately after birth the infant becomes aware of its new situation. It no longer has a sense of weightlessness. Touching is a new experience. It begins to become aware of people. In the natural course of events, it sees, hears and smells its mother or other caring person. She looks at, touches, and speaks to it. This is the first stage of maternal-infant bonding. In this first interaction with caring people around it, the infant begins to build a personality structure. Its future relationship with family and peers depends a great deal on the quality of this structure.

60. Bonding, or maternal attachment to the child, is a two-way process with both mother and child participating. There is the eye-to-eye contact between mother and child. Signals contained in eye and body movements between mother and child encourage the bonding process. The newborn infant has more awareness than is often realized. Its senses of hearing and smell are well developed. It soon recognizes the scent of its mother. The infant lying on its mother's body initiates the secretion of the maternal hormones.³¹ The cry of the baby and breast feeding stimulate the mother's bonding.

61. Recent research has found that separating mothers and their newborn in the early post-partum hours and days diminishes attachment behaviour in the mothers. It strongly suggests that the first two hours following parturition are particularly sensitive ones for the development and maintenance of attachment behaviour in the mothers and infants. Thus it does appear that, by separating mothers and infants after birth — as is routinely done in some hospitals in North America — we may be interfering with the mother-infant behavioural cycle, an interference which is disruptive to successful breastfeeding and establishment of affectional bonds.

62. There is no apparent medical reason for separating healthy mothers and babies. This disruption may be serious for the mother who is suffering an emotional disturbance or who may have been deserted or deprived herself in early childhood, or for the mother of an infant which is premature or malformed.

63. Thus, for the mother and infant at risk, where there is a chance that the maternal capacity to form attachments may be impaired already, it may be crucial to the survival of the newborn and to the maintenance of the mother's confidence, self-esteem and caretaking capacity, to provide her with the opportunity to establish those bonds with her infant