

PLAY: Attachment's Magic Key

By Jean MacLeod

What if someone told you that you held the key to your child's love in your fingertips? That PLAYING with your adopted child would strengthen your bond together, and deepen your child's trust... would you wonder how something as vital as "attunement and attachment" could be so physically simple?

Child's play may be simple, but playing for a child's love, playing for keeps, is both imperative and purposeful. Nothing should be as satisfying to your son or daughter as your touch, your eyes, and your smile. Therapeutic play between a parent and child recognizes the importance of a parent's position, and places Mom or Dad in the starring role as The Best Toy in The World.

"Theraplay™" is a specific form of therapist-led play between a parent and their child. It stresses the normal, healthy pattern of playful attachment that occurs naturally between a mother and her biological baby or toddler, and it re-teaches an adopted child the magical give-and-take of a reciprocal relationship. Theraplay reproduces and formalizes the healthy bio-pattern with a process called structure, engagement, nurture, challenge and playfulness.

Essentially, Theraplay™ is focused intimacy and eye contact and FUN. Physical and emotional closeness can be frightening to a child with attachment issues, or even rage-inducing to a child with Reactive Attachment Disorder. Theraplay™ teaches basic trust with dis-arming silliness, and promotes re-parenting of the young child through a nurturing "babyhood" he or she may never have had.

PLAY is one key to unlock an unattached child's heart; it doesn't take the place of attachment therapy for children with difficult issues, but therapeutic play is a wonderful, additional tool for parents to practice regularly at home. To equip families for fun, Doris Landry, MS, LLP, has put together a "Bonding Basket" of supplies to keep on hand:

DORIS' "BONDING BASKET"

Silly String or Foam	Baby Powder
Hand / Body Lotion	Cotton Balls
List of Baby Songs to sing	Mirror
Baby Blanket	Loving Story/ Picture Books
Soft Baby Hairbrush	Band Aids

Favorite Snack Foods	Tape Measure
Baby Bottle for juice or milk (or sippy cup if child refuses to use a nipple)	Nail Clippers
First Aid Ointment	Magnifying Glass
Variety of Tactile, Sensitive Materials or Swatches	Paint Brushes- small and soft
Baby Spoon	Small Flashlight

Additionally, the following list of activities from The Theraplay™ Institute has been generated for families to use in a home setting. Be creative—branch out from the list. Build on what delights your child, what makes you both laugh and what draws you close. Attachment’s “magic key” is really a series of small, loving, playful moments that promise to go on forever.



Home Theraplay™ Activities for Young Children

By The Theraplay™ Institute

Tower of hands: Put lotion on parent's and child's hands and make a handLullaby: Parent cradles child in arms in such a way that eye contact is fully maintained. Parent sings lullaby to child, inserting, wherever possible, child's name and descriptions of his or her features. Example: "Twinkle, twinkle little star, what a lovely boy you are. Nice brown hair and soft, soft cheeks. Big brown eyes from which you peek. Twinkle, twinkle little star. What a lovely boy you are."

Peek-a-boo with hands, feet, towel, blanket, hood of coat, behind pillow or door.

This little piggy went to market.

What will happen when I push this button: Parent gently presses nose, ear, toe and "beeps," "honks," etc.

"Pop" cheeks: Parent fills own cheeks with air and guides child's hands to push gently on parent's cheeks with fingers to pop out the air, encourage child to fill up cheeks and parent pops. Toes can also be used to pop cheeks.

Patty-cake: can be played with feet too!

Any song or rhyme paired with movement, such as dancing, bouncing, rocking, moving limbs, finger plays. Personalized wording, as in Twinkle above, is preferred. Examples: Rock a bye baby, Patty cake, Itsy bitsy spider, Ride a horsie, The wheels on the bus, Rub a dub dub, I'm gonna get you.

Various experiences with touch and textures: Lotioning, making hand or foot prints in powder, pressing hands or feet into play dough or shaving cream, baby oil for back rub with the child facing you. Be aware of possible sensitivities to odors.

Activities promoting eye contact: parent puts sticker on own nose and helps child pull it off: parent puts cotton ball on nose with a dab of lotion, child blows it off. Blow bubbles in front of child and help him pop with fingers or toes.

Lotion pass: parent puts lotion on nose, passes to child's cheek, helps child pass it back to parent's forehead, rubs lotion on child.

Comb hair with child facing you, commenting on special color, texture, etc.

Stack, alternating slippery hands. Move from bottom to top and top to bottom.

Pushing over: Parent and child are face to face with child lying on back cradled between parent's legs; parent and child put hands together or child puts feet on parent's shoulders; child pushes parent over (gently) while parent comments on strength. Note: pushes can also be with fingertips, noses, elbows, etc.

Blowing over: blowing mightily, parent "blows over child" encourage child to do same.

Games for 2 adults

Back and forth: child runs, hops, somersaults between 2 adults with encouragement and happy greetings upon arriving at each adult.

Hiding and finding: one parent hides with the child by covering both with a blanket or pillows, other parent joyfully finds and uncovers the treasure.

Catch: parents gently cradle child, swing and carefully "toss" to the other parent.

Shoe and sock race: both parents race to put kisses on feet, then cover with shoes and socks.

Blanket swing: place child in blanket and give a gentle swing, can be done while singing to child. Lyrics might be: "My (name) lies over the ocean..."

Wiggle in and out: Child wiggles out of and back into parent's encircling arms.

For general information about Theraplay™, newsletter subscriptions, and Theraplay™ Association membership, contact: The Theraplay™ Institute, 3330 Old Glenview Road, Suite 8, Wilmette, Illinois, 60091 Phone: 847-256-7334, Fax: 847-256-7370. E-mail: theraplay@aol.com.

©1996, 1997 The Theraplay™ Institute
All rights reserved.
Design by Aristotle.