



Bonding & Communicating with your special needs child

Bonding with your special needs child

Bonding is...

- Developing emotional intimacy between you and your child
- Developing a sense of security, self-esteem and self worth for your child
- Providing your child with a sense of belonging to the family

Parents of special needs children can go to the extreme of over bonding with their children

Over bonding is...

- When the child is overindulged and smothered with attention
- When the child is not allowed autonomy
- When the child is not expected to take responsibility for her actions
- When all attention is on the child to the exclusion of spouse and other family members (other children)
- When the parents devote *all* of their life, energy, effort, and health to the child
- When the parents feel a sense of over-responsibility / over-concern for the child

How do I know if I have a healthy bond with my special needs child?

If you are:

Overly protective, smothering and hysterical	Accepting and coping	Detached, rejecting and withdrawn (<i>example: not wanting to hold the baby</i>)
Critical and non-trusting towards helpers of your child [<i>example: teachers, health care providers</i>]	Involved and active with helpers of your child	Disinterested and ignore helpers of your child
Permissive, babying and pampering your child because of her disability	Understanding of your child's disability	Blaming your child for her disability, ostracizing & condemning her
Over-bonding	Healthy Bonding	Lack of Bonding

Activities to improve bonding

With infants...

- **Body Touching:** periodically, lay your naked infant on your bare chest and let your bodies touch. Talk gently and lovingly to your child
- **Baby massage**
- **Physically hold your baby** face to face and talk to him or her several times a day

With older children...

- **Face to face:** Sit face to face and play a game of naming body parts
- **Hug-a-Game:** play a game with your child in which the reward for the correct answer is a hug
- **Tickle game:** lie on the bed or the floor (dressed) with your child on your chest so that the child's head is close to your head. Whisper and talk to your child and tickle her body gently. Begin to roll from side to side as you say "Whee" or "Whoo" as you roll
- **Butterflies:** pretend you and your child are caterpillars in a cocoon of blankets. Lay quietly or sing softly to one another. After a while, pretend you are two butterflies breaking out of a cocoon. Throw off the covers and "fly" around the room

Communicating with your special needs child

In talking with your child, remember to...

- Answer questions in an honest and straightforward way
- Give accurate and scientific information easily understood at your child's level. Always use correct names for the condition such as Spina Bifida, Down Syndrome, Cystic Fibrosis, etc.
- Allow your child to vent feelings about her condition and provide support, compassion and understanding
- Listen to your child's distress without reacting in a personal manner. Instead, react with a "we love you" attitude
- Disclose what is wrong with your child without hiding the truth. Avoid keeping secrets about her condition or prognosis
- Avoid self-pity and negativity in *all* discussions with your child
- Avoid *blame* in describing the causes for the condition
- Consider your child *first* as a child, *then* as a child with a disability

What skills do parents need to communicate effectively?

- Improve your listening skills and tune into your child's feelings
- Be nonjudgmental about what your child is saying and feeling
- Clarify what your child is "really" saying and help her sort out *feelings* from *content* of the problem
- Help your child be assertive with those who are violating her rights