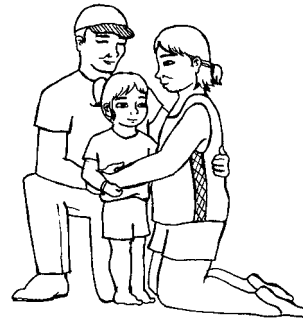




CHAPTER 7

Strong relationships help children grow well

Creating a warm, nurturing relationship is the most important thing parents, relatives, and other caregivers can do to help children grow and develop well. When children have good relationships with their caregivers, they learn what makes them feel safe and they learn about the world. This bond encourages children to communicate well and express their feelings.



Building a relationship for life

Children's bodies and minds develop fast when they are between 3 to 5 years old. Having one main caregiver who stays with the child when the child's brain develops a lot is important for the child to grow and develop well.

The relationship a baby develops with her main caregiver will affect the rest of the baby's physical and emotional development. If a baby is looked after by many different caregivers, the baby will not understand what it means to form a relationship with someone. And this will make it difficult for the baby to form new relationships with other people later on.



Many children grow up in extended families. Children may call one mother "little mother" and the other "big mother."

It is important for the main caregiver — the mother, father or an older sister or brother, or a relative, or a caring community member — to understand and respond to a child's needs. Strong, and close relationships are created between caregivers and children when children feel safe and trust caregivers to meet their needs.

Communication builds strong relationships

The caregiver's actions, gestures, and expressions communicate in ways the child understands. This "communication" forms a bond of trust and builds a strong relationship.



Chen understands just a few words his caregiver says. But he receives many messages from her body movements, facial expressions, and tone of voice.

When caregivers and children communicate well, caregivers sense and respond to children's needs. This response helps children feel safe, and they will want to communicate with other people.

Since children begin communicating with behavior first, communication has one final goal: to help a child feel understood and to participate more fully in her family and community.

Communication happens when:

- one person sends a message
- another person receives the message and responds.

Ways children send and receive messages

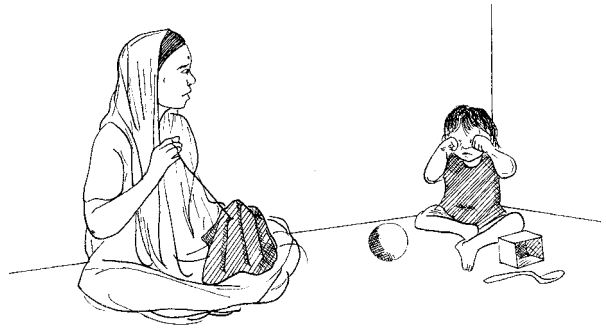
Babies are born with the ability to send messages to their caregivers. But at first babies do not know they are doing this. A baby begins knowing she is sending a message when her caregiver repeatedly treats her behavior as a message and responds. For example, when a caregiver picks up a crying baby, the crying baby has made something happen. The baby then realizes that the caregiver has responded to her message — in this case, her cry for comfort.

Watch children communicate with their behavior

Young children communicate more with behavior than words. Even when children begin to talk, children — especially those in difficult circumstances — have already experienced much more than they can understand or express in words. Their behavior is the best clue to the messages they are sending.

Learning to understand what a child is communicating through her behavior takes practice. You may be able to avoid certain behavior problems if you understand what causes them. Your child may:

- need attention. She may have learned she gets more attention if she behaves badly.
- feel tired, hungry, or afraid of something.
- not understand what you want. Or she may want something but be unable to communicate it so you understand.
- have been teased or treated badly by another child or adult.
- be copying another child's behavior.
- not be able to meet your expectations. Or she may be resisting limits that you have set, or showing you she does not want to do what you want.



Even though you may understand why your child becomes upset, there will be times when she gets upset no matter what you do. But if you can see a child's behavior as her way of communicating with you, you may be able to take care of the child's need before it becomes a problem.

UNDERSTAND AND RESPOND TO CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOR

1. Watch

Try to become so familiar with a child's behavior. As much as possible, try to spend time watching:

- the way a child's body moves.
- the sounds she makes.
- the times she seems distressed and what comforts her.
- the way she responds to other children and her caregivers.
- the activities she most enjoys or that hold her interest.

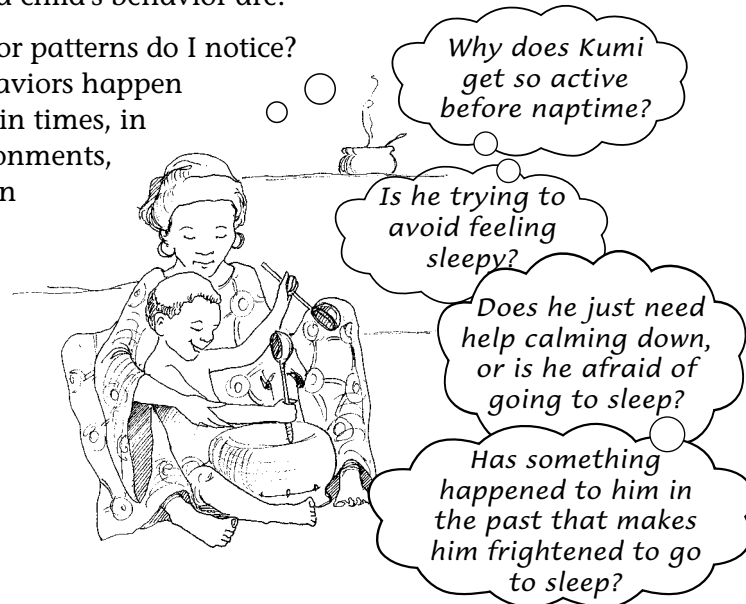


Abena has noticed that Kumi gets very active before naptime, running from one activity to the next.

2. Ask questions

Try to ask questions about what a child's behavior means. This is important because 2 children may be behaving the same way and yet be sending different messages. Some questions that can help you discover the meaning of a child's behavior are:

- What behavior patterns do I notice?
Do these behaviors happen more at certain times, in certain environments, or with certain people?
- Why might a child act this way? What feelings and needs are being expressed?



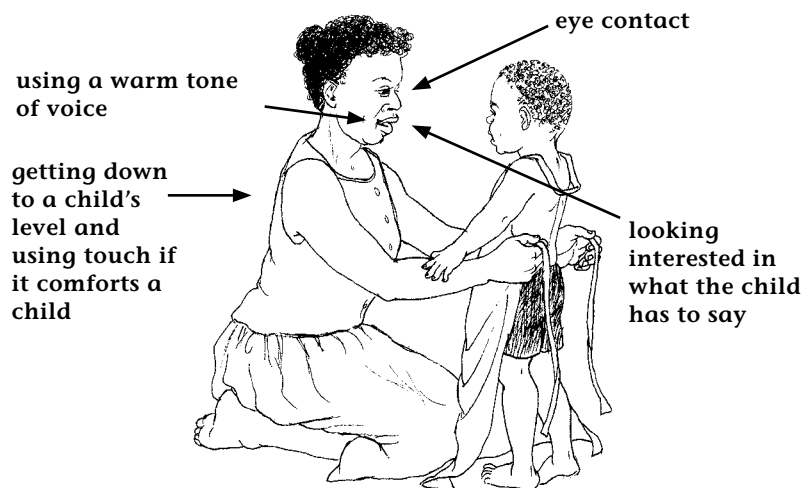
3. Respond

Decide and try out a response. As you do, continue to watch and ask: Does my response work? If it seems to help — at least a little — it may be worth trying for a longer time. If your response does not work, you need to do something else. Try watching and asking questions to receive a more complete message.



Abena decides to try holding Kumi before naptime, reminding him that she will keep him safe.

Messages can be sent with behavior and with words. So, it is important to pay attention to the messages you send with your body. Try to notice the way people in your community send warm, caring messages with their bodies and use these when you respond to children. For example, in many communities, caring is communicated in these ways:



As much as possible, share information with other caregivers about what you observe, what you think it means, and what responses have worked well.

Ways toddlers and older children communicate

Toddlers and older children communicate with:

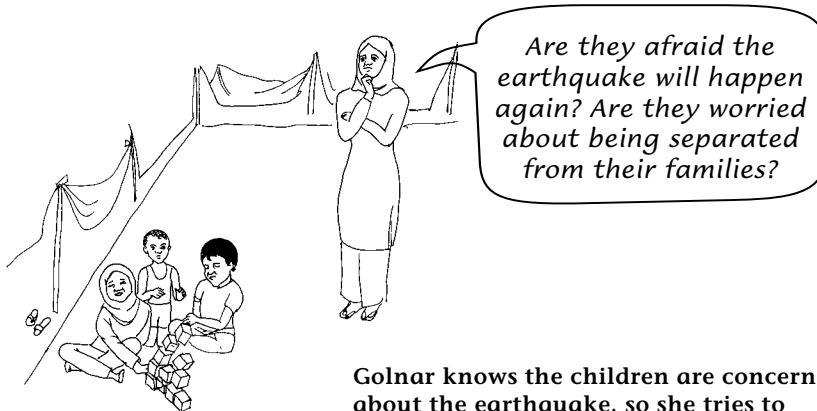
- pretend play and
- creative activities like acting out stories, drawing, playing music, or dancing.

You can continue to watch, ask questions and respond to understand the messages older children are sending. When you observe their activities, try asking questions like these:

- What themes come up over and over again?
- What feelings and needs is a child expressing through these themes?



Since the earthquake ruined part of their city, Simin, Feroz, and Nasim have been repeatedly knocking over piles of blocks.

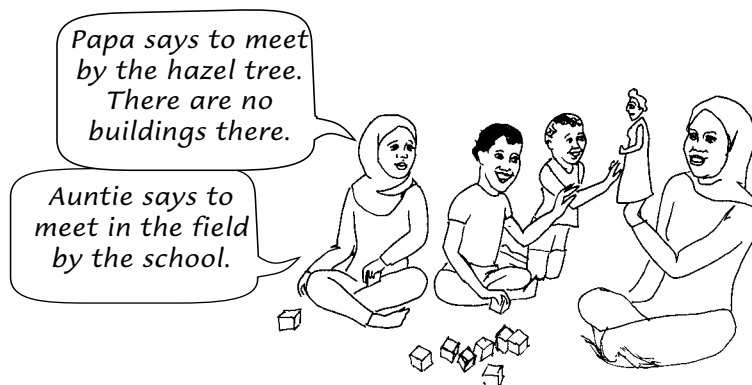


Golnar knows the children are concerned about the earthquake, so she tries to understand their fears.

Play and creative activities can help children express and cope with difficult feelings. See Chapter XX for suggestions about how to help children express feelings through play. To cope with feelings, children need to play out the same or similar scenes over and over. You can encourage this through joining their play or by speaking with them.



Golnar helps the children feel more safe by teaching safety through play.



To address other fears, Golnar thinks that direct teaching — and sharing ideas — works best.

Children need caregivers to help them heal

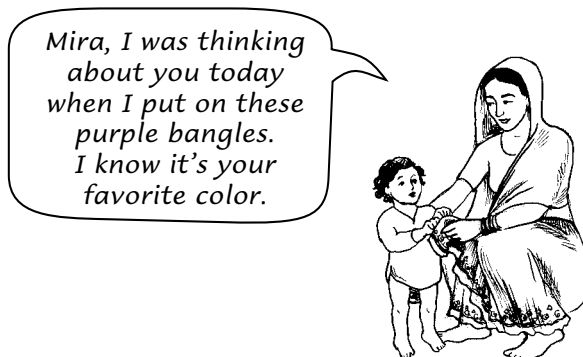
Children who have experienced trauma, the loss of caregivers or other difficulties need caregivers who can help them heal.

- Show warm, loving feelings to a child



Jose uses eye contact, a warm tone of voice, holding, and getting down to the children's level to show he cares about them.

- Emotions and feelings are passed through eye contact. So are touch, holding, and stroking — especially with younger children.



When a child knows she has a place in your thoughts, she feels more secure and loved.

- Follow a child's lead

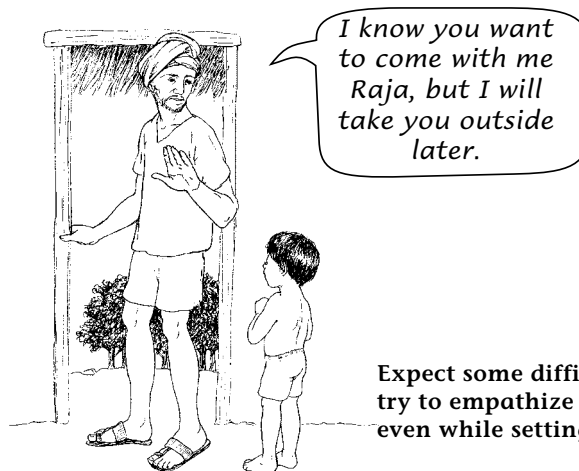


Throughout the day, try to find time to let a child show you his interests. Try to be fully involved — even if just for a short time — in what she wants to do.



When following a child's lead, let him be the powerful one. This helps him feel strong and more in control.

- Try to understand things from child's perspective

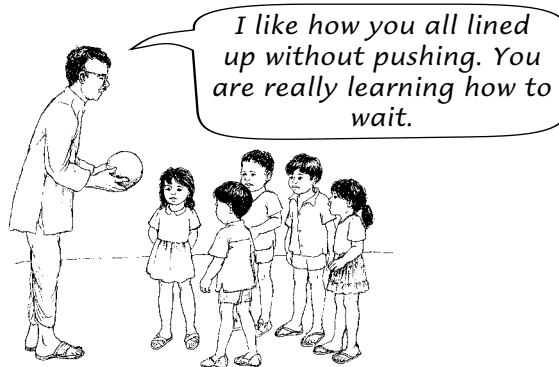


Expect some difficult behavior and try to empathize with your child, even while setting limits.

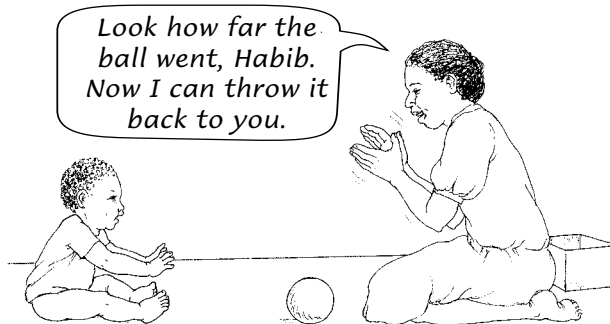


If you remember stress makes children act younger than they are, you can understand when they start doing things they had stopped doing.

- Always notice and let children know when they do something well.



Pointing out what children do well — rather than what they do wrong — builds their confidence and sense of worth.



For a young child, having you notice a new skill is just as important as accomplishing it.

Set clear limits

There are times when you have to tell a child “No,” and set limits. This may be to keep children safe, or because they want to do something you cannot allow them to do. Before you say “No,” think about it carefully. Once you tell a child he cannot do something or have something, you should not change your mind. If you let children change your mind, through crying, then they will learn to cry when they want to change your mind.

Understanding the limits you have set, allow children to know you are in control and that they can be safe with you.

- Children of different ages need to have different limits. The limits you set will change as children gets older and learn more about the world. For information on setting limits, see Chapter XX.

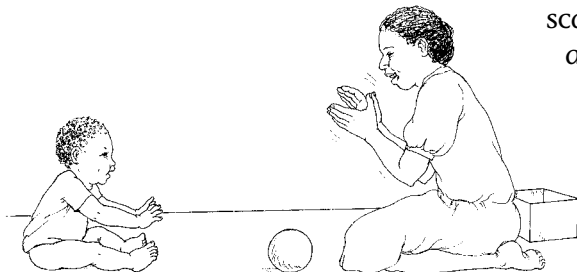


Handle separations with care

All young children find it hard to separate from their main caregivers.

But children who have experienced difficult circumstances such as war, or the death of a caregiver, will find it even more distressing to be separated from their

caregiver. They may be more scared when their caregivers are away. Children who have experienced loss may be afraid their caregivers will never return.

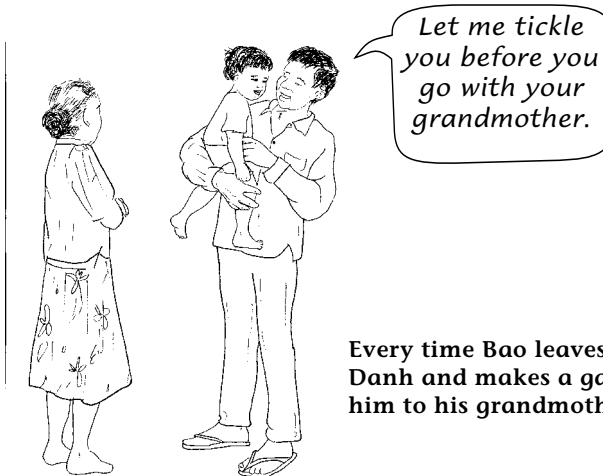


However, despite the fear children feel, almost all children are separated from their caregivers from time to time. Here are some guidelines that can help ease a child's fears:

- Always tell a child when you will be going and when you will return — even if you think a child is too young to understand. To help young children have a sense of time, connect the time of your return to something that happens every day.
- Try and leave the child with a familiar person — in many places children usually know many adults in the community. If a child does not know the person who will be caring for her while you are gone, introduce the two of them ahead of time.
- Avoid separations as much as possible until child and caregiver have developed a strong bond. Begin with small separations at first and then make them longer.



DEVELOP RITUALS FOR LEAVING



Every time Bao leaves, he tickles Danh and makes a game of handing him to his grandmother.

Use an item of the caregiver's clothing, such as a shirt, a scarf, or a towel or some other special object for the child to hold onto until you return. A child often picks certain objects — like a soft animal, doll, or blanket — as his special toy. He may carry the object around wherever he goes. When separated from his caregiver, the special object will comfort the child and help him feel less alone.



- Help a child find something to look forward to in the change of caregivers. You could, for example, plan something together to show his temporary caregiver. Or remind a child about something he and this caregiver enjoy doing together.



- Always respect a child's feelings about the separation and help the child express his feelings about it. You can help a child name his feelings or even do a role play about the child's feelings. Even when you talk and work through these feelings in pretend play, the child may still express anger and sadness when you leave. For more information, see the chapter on "Methods to help children understand and express feelings."



When Leyla acts out her caregiver's leaving and return, she gets to decide when her caregiver comes and goes. This helps her feel more powerful and independent — but also she looks forward to her caregiver's return.

Sometimes children are upset and angry with the caregiver when the person returns. They may not greet the caregiver with a hug but rather by withdrawing. Caregivers must acknowledge when children are upset. You can show the child you are happy to see her and give her time to warm up to you again.

Separations longer than a few days are very difficult for young children. See guidelines in Chapter XX to help a child cope with a long, but not permanent, separation and when children must permanently change caregivers.