



Centre for
Perinatal Psychology
Helping you towards parenthood



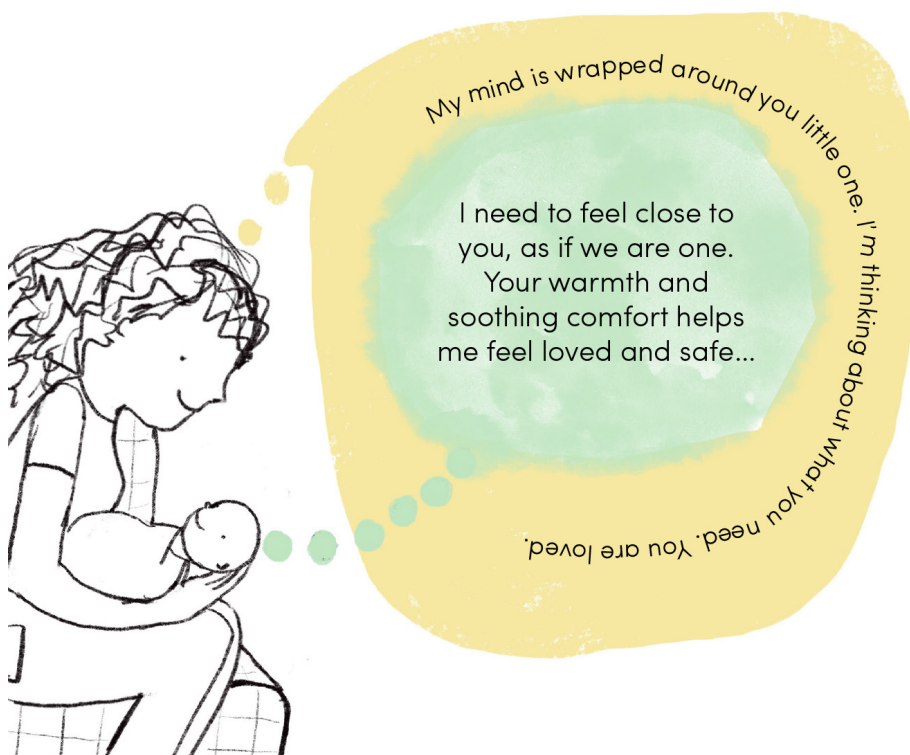
Attunement

Speaking for the Baby Campaign

An attuned state is a connected state; connected by being 'in tune with' each other. In the context of babies, it is the parent's responsibility to attune to their baby, rather than expecting the baby to attune to the parent. This means the parent observes and interprets how the baby is feeling and reacts accordingly. Through attunement, the parent and baby share an emotional bond, and the parent is able to recognise and participate in the baby's emotional state, whether it is happiness or distress.

Attunement in the Fourth Trimester

During late pregnancy and the first weeks after birth, parents often become deeply focused on their newborn. This heightened attention enables them to meet the baby's needs swiftly, as newborns require immediate care. The parent's preoccupation increases their sensitivity to the baby's needs and helps them get to know their baby. This process is crucial in developing the capacity for attunement, as it almost feels as though the parent's mind is wrapped around their baby's mind.



Attunement in babies 9+ months

As baby grows and develops they look to actively share emotional experiences with others. Parental attunement in this context goes beyond being 'in tune' with baby and includes 'playing back the tune', matching the baby's feeling state. This signals mum (or dad) understands and shares in baby's experience.

The next illustration gives an exquisite example of maternal attunement and responsiveness. Mum is quietly observing baby and tuned in to her baby's emotional state; when the baby expresses delight in the sound she's making on the xylophone, mum recognises this and responds by matching her baby's expression of delight with immediacy and with equal intensity and length of response with that sing-song 'Yaaaaaaaay!'. Mum's 'yay' lasts about as long as her daughter's excitable moments hitting the xylophone. They share the moment, because mum 'plays back the tune' to her baby to show how she feels. As in this example, attunement is often intuitive and playful.

Maternal Attunement



Paternal Attunement



It's not just mums who are good at playing back the tune and sharing in baby's delight! Dads are great at this too! So are grandparents!

The Importance of Attunement for Infant Development

It is through these shared experiences that baby comes to learn about themselves, others and the world. Babies also learn that feelings can be shared and understood by another, creating connection to others and confidence that their feelings can be understood.

Attunement is not a permanent or continuous state. Instead, being tuned in with another person occurs in fleeting moments, and naturally comes to an end. This ending is often referred to as a rupture, or temporary disconnection. Read more about the Attuned-Rupture-Repair Cycle in our dedicated handout.



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