



Centre for  
**Perinatal Psychology**  
*Helping you towards parenthood*



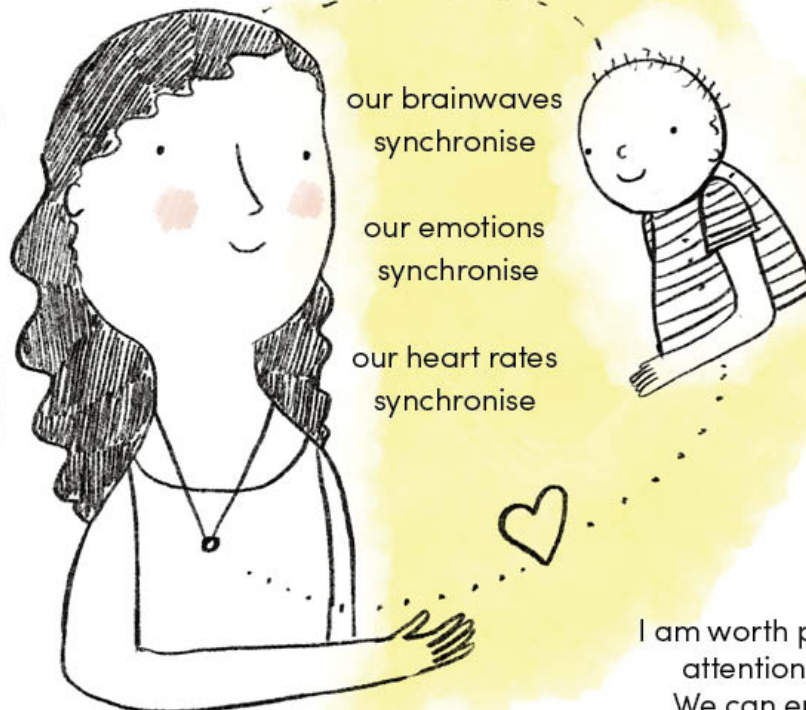
## When We Hold Each Other's Gaze

### *Speaking for the Baby Campaign*

Mutual gaze is a primary form of social exchange used throughout human life, offering a point of connection that fosters early emotional and social bonds. Infants demonstrate agency by choosing when to make eye contact and when to avert their gaze. Prolonged eye gaze can serve a connecting and co-regulating function for many, but not all, babies.

*When we hold  
each other's gaze...*

*Twinkle, twinkle little star...*



our brainwaves  
synchronise

our emotions  
synchronise

our heart rates  
synchronise

I am worth paying  
attention to!  
We can enjoy  
together!

## Benefits for Baby

- Mutual gaze offers numerous benefits for the baby, including the stimulation and promotion of neuronal connections in the developing brain
- It helps to organise and regulate the baby's experiences, contributing to their overall sense of wellbeing
- Studies have shown that when mutual gaze is held, the states of body and mind synchronise between mother or father and baby, including their brainwaves, their heart rates and their emotional states – amazing!
- In this way, mutual gaze can help to keep baby's experience organised and regulated

## How can mutual gaze be supported?

Babies need to be in the right state to engage. A quiet alert state is best, when baby is calm, attentive, and receptive to interaction. Parents need to recognise when their baby is seeking out communication and to be available to their baby to interact.

It's hard work for a little one to keep up with the intensity of mutual gaze, so they need breaks. When they look away it's usually because they are tired or becoming over-stimulated. They tend to look away to take a rest and recover. It's not because they are bored of you, or don't like you. In these moments, wait patiently until your little one is ready to look back and have another round of connection. When they don't look back, they are probably ready for another activity.

## Differences in comfortability with mutual gaze

This illustration is based on research showing that infants' and parents' brain activity becomes most synchronised during mutual eye contact, mainly due to their shared intention to communicate.

The intention to communicate is important, because some mothers, fathers and babies are less comfortable with eye contact, especially the intensity of prolonged mutual gaze. This is evident in some neurodivergent people, especially autistics. Communication between autistic parents and/or babies can look different from neurotypical communication, not worse, just different. While mutual eye gaze can be beneficial, it is only beneficial when it feels comfortable to both parties. Mutual gaze should not be forced or demanded. Follow the lead of your baby, they will let you know what feels comfortable for them. There are lots of ways to communicate and connect and you will find what is best for the two of you.



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