

Bonding with baby/ Training through example

Carol: It took so long for my baby to be born– 27 hours of labour. I was so tired, but I wanted that little baby in my arms so badly that I had extra strength to push through. People often talk about miracles, well . . . that morning a perfect little girl was laid on my chest and I just cried. Yes, I was tired, but I looked at Katie’s little hands and feet and stroked her little head . . . she was a miracle. It was the beginning of a love affair that just keeps growing.

Tammy: Hello, and welcome to Women of Hope. I’m Tammy, and I do hope we can stay with you for a while today. Carol, you have two children, and both are adults now. How did you feel about the birth of your first baby?

Carol: Tammy, being a mother was something I had looked forward to for a long time. I was almost 30 when my first baby, Katie, came along. I was so ready for that stage of my life to begin. So excited. But I couldn’t believe how I felt when she was actually there.

Tammy: Isn’t it wonderful when you finally get to hold that little baby? My first baby’s birth was by an operation.

Carol: You had a Caesarean section didn’t you?

Tammy: Yes! And I had some complications, so it was a day or so before I could even hold my baby, Rachel.

Carol: That must have been so hard Tammy.

Tammy: Yes, I just ached to have her in my arms. And then later I felt my heart full of love every time I picked her up or watched her sleep.

Carol: And you had two more babies after Rachel.

Tammy: We did! Our sons C.J. and Caleb. And with each new baby, I would think, “I can’t possibly love another person like this” – but there’s always more in your heart to give. I think every baby is a special gift from God, and it makes its own space in your heart.

Carol: You know, Tammy, I felt that incredible burst of love in those first moments with our daughter Katie. And then 3 years it happened again. When my son Ray was born I remember thinking – ‘as full of love as I feel right now, this is only a small picture of the love that God has for each of his children’.

We sometimes talk about *bonding* with our baby. Bonding is the strong attachment that develops between parents and their baby. It makes parents want to shower their baby with love and to protect and nourish their little one.

Tammy: I think bonding must be what gets a mother up in the middle of the night to feed her hungry baby and clean up its messes.

Carol: Without a doubt! Bonding makes us recognise our own baby's cry. It makes a baby recognise his own mother's face and voice at a very early age. I think it's an amazing part of the way God made us, don't you? These strong ties between parents and their child give the baby his first taste of love and close relationships. These help the baby to feel secure and good about the world and himself. It actually makes a difference to how a baby's brain develops, if he has strong bonds with his parents.

Tammy: You know, as soon as your baby is born, he or she is all ready to bond with you. During those first hours your baby is usually quite alert. He can focus on close objects like his mother's face. He looks around searching to find someone with whom he can bond. Your newborn baby can hear well too. He will turn to follow whatever he sees and hears. ...And it will feel natural for you to speak to your baby using a higher pitched voice that's easy for the baby to hear.

You will also notice that your baby responds to *touch*. When you touch or hold him he will snuggle as close to you as possible. If possible, hold your child close to your body immediately after he's born. The warmth of your body and skin contact can communicate so much of your love to the baby.

Carol: But for some families it's not as easy as it was for us. There can be all sorts of reasons why bonding is difficult - maybe the mother was sick, or depressed, or anxious, or just exhausted after a long, painful labor. Or maybe the baby was sick or premature and the mother couldn't hold him or her for a long time. Or the baby wasn't really wanted at all. If you've had trouble bonding, please, don't think you're a failure; but do listen as we talk about ways to develop this connection with your baby.

Tammy: If you're a mother who feels that you've missed this bonding during the first hours of your baby's life, don't feel bad or guilty. It's never too late to start. Take time to look at your baby and smile; talk to him; sing to him, and hold him close to your body. Look into his eyes, laugh and respond to what he does. When you do this, your child will know that you love him and care for him. And he can grow and develop as a whole and complete person.

Carol: Touch is especially important for babies. And touch can be so simple. Just holding your baby and gently stroking him or her is very important. And holding your newborn against your own skin when you're feeding or just cuddling them can be so natural. Gentle massage is another lovely way to have relaxed bonding time together. If both parents, or other family members, hold and touch your baby frequently, your baby will soon come to know each different person.

Tammy: But bonding is a *process*, not something that takes place within minutes. Some women have severe depression after they have a baby, and they should definitely speak to their health worker about that and get treatment. It might take them a little longer to bond with their baby. It doesn't have to happen within a certain time period after birth. Parents who adopt a baby can bond just as well as natural parents. For many parents, bonding happens gradually as they care for their baby day after day. You might not even know it's happening until you notice your baby's first smile and suddenly realize that you're filled with love and joy.

Tammy: Here on Women of Hope we've been talking about bonding with our babies. Do you think it's important that babies bond with their fathers as well as their mothers. Is that the way people think in your community?

Carol: I think it's sad that some fathers are not interested in their babies, or only take notice of them if they're boys. But many dads really long for contact with their children, and it's very important for both father and baby. Dads don't have the early contact of breastfeeding that many mothers have, so it might take longer for them than it does for mothers.

Tammy: But dads need to understand that bonding with their child doesn't mean they have to be another mother. Dads mostly do *different* things with their babies. I love watching a man play with his child- they seem to have a lot of fun! And both parents benefit when they can support and encourage one another.

Carol: In your culture, is the father allowed to be present when his baby is born? It's become much more common in many countries, and helps fathers to understand what it's like for their wives. It can be a very special time for the father to have that very early contact with the baby.

Tammy: In our country they teach the fathers how to support their wives through labor. We also encourage fathers to help with feeding if the baby has bottle feeds, and to help with bathing and changing the baby, if possible. (*Producers: you might need to make this culturally appropriate*)

Carol: And the father can talk or sing to the baby, or play games like copying his baby's movements or the sounds he makes. The baby will learn to communicate through those sounds.

Tammy: The father can let the baby feel his face; it will feel different from the mother's face. The father will smell different too. And he can carry the baby, and walk around with him if he's unsettled.

Carol: At first, caring for a newborn can take nearly all of your time and energy — especially if you're breastfeeding. Bonding will be much easier if you're not exhausted by all of the other things that have to be done. It's helpful if the father or friends can help with these everyday tasks, as well as offer plenty of emotional support and encouragement.

And it's OK to ask family and friends for help in the days and weeks after you have your baby. In lots of places, the new mother has *her* mother to help her, or another family member. Other friends might bring meals, or look after the other children for a little while, while the mother rests.

Tammy: So you can see that bonding is complex and very personal, and takes time. There's no magic formula and it can't be forced. If your baby's basic needs are being met, he won't suffer if the bond isn't very strong at first. As you become more comfortable with your baby and more used to your new routine, you will feel more confident about being a parent. So have fun, and enjoy your baby!

Carol: You're with Women of Hope, and we've been talking about bonding with our babies. Today our dear friend Marli is with us. Marli is a mother, and grandmother. But did you know, she started

Women of Hope, and she loves you very much. Marli; as always, welcome. We're looking forward to hearing from you today.

Marli: Thank you Carol. Yes, I do love my Women of Hope very much and I'm so happy to talk to you today.

If I asked you: "Do you love your child?" you would probably say: "Of course I do, I am his mother." It's natural, isn't it, even before a baby's born, for the mother to love that tiny little person who's being formed inside her body.

A child should be born from a union of two people who dearly love each other, who are committed to each other in marriage, for life. This is God's original design for human beings. You see, we were created by God, whose name is Love! He gave parents to children to love and protect them.

Children are given to parents as a gift from God. We do more than feed and clothe them- our job is to teach them to relate to others. We are made to have relationships- with God, and with people. How does a child become aware of this relationship? How do children learn the way to live? Let's think about this.

My youngest son loved animals. He had two big dogs, two birds and a cat. His animals respond to him and give him so much joy and companionship. However, no animal can ever take the place of another human being. Why? God made us to have relationships with other people. We learn who we are as humans, by living in a community and having human relationships.

Let me tell you about a boy who was abandoned in a jungle when he was little. He grew up with no human influence; only animals surrounded him. What happened? He learned to live as an animal! Human babies need to *learn* what it means to be human. The way they learn is to live in close relationship with other human beings. Children are *great* imitators! They will copy adult behavior all the time; sometimes that's very funny to watch. Mostly, little boys want to be like their daddies, and little girls want to be like their mommies. We are our children's most important teachers. Whether we like it or not, they will become like us!

The Bible tells us about some children who did the same as their fathers and mothers before them. The apostle Paul was an early leader of those who followed the Lord Jesus Christ, and he wrote a letter to his young friend, Timothy. He wrote: "I have been reminded of your sincere faith which first lived in your grandmother, Lois, and in your mother, Eunice, and I am sure it now lives in you too." (2 Timothy 1: 5). Timothy's grandmother, Lois, taught his mother, Eunice, to be a Godly mother. Eunice then taught her son, Timothy, to be an honest man of faith. Do you see the chain of blessing here, which started way back with the grandmother?

Children will naturally follow our example. We have quite a responsibility, don't we? Everything they hear, see and experience makes an impression on them...it teaches them how to live. Have you ever heard this saying: "Do what I say, not what I do"? Many parents live this way. They want their children to be polite, but they *never* say, "Thank you" or "I'm sorry", to anyone. They expect their children to

respect others, but they treat their spouse and children with no respect at all. They want their children to be responsible, but they do not *act* responsibly. Unfortunately, children are watching and learning the *wrong* lesson. Because they will always *do* what we do...not what we *say*.

You see, the way we treat our children will show them how to treat their own children. As we prepare meals and keep our home clean and orderly, they are learning how to manage a home. The way we take care of their physical and emotional needs and teach them about life, love, good and evil - all of this is important. It's also very important that we teach them about God, and his love for them, and the stories of Jesus, like the ones we share on Women of Hope.

However, the *most* important of all is not what we say or do for them but the kind of people we are. Ask yourself: "Who am I when no one else is watching me? What do I think about? What kind of attitude do I have?" You see, whatever is inside of us will spill over, especially to our children. If we are angry, hurt or bitter inside, this is what will come out of our mouths - angry, hurtful and bitter words! If we are loving and kind inside, then loving and kind words will come out of our mouths. As we follow Jesus, God will change our hearts and change the way we live, and the things we say.

Maybe you're thinking: "Oh, this is *too* much for me. I just do not have what it takes to be a good parent! No one has taught me this before. My children are growing up in a home full of strife with no respect. What can I do? Where can I get help? How can I break the cycle?"

My dear friend, I know change is really hard. You will need to make some big decisions, and lots of small changes. Maybe you can ask God to help you. You can ask for his wonderful wisdom, to make you into a loving, patient and wise parent. Come to God and ask him to give you strength for this task every day. And then, try to learn more about Jesus Christ, so you can show your children how to grow up to be adults with honesty and grace. Look also for the counsel of godly people around you. Or write to us.

I want to pray with you:

"Dear God, I bring you our friend who is feeling overwhelmed as a parent – that she is not good enough. Please heal her heart. Help her so that she will be a Godly role model to her kids. I pray that Jesus Christ, Your Son, will save her soul and give her peace. Bless her children; bless the father of her children. Bless this family we pray In Jesus' name. Amen"

Carol: Thank you Marli. As you were talking, I was thinking...God loves us even *more* than we love our children. And in just the same way as our new baby can't do anything to earn our love, so we can't do anything to earn God's love. He loves us simply because he is full of love and compassion, and he knows how much we need him. And Marli talked about teaching by example- well, Jesus certainly taught us how to live, by giving us a wonderful example.

Marli: You're so right Carol, Jesus set us a perfect example in so many ways. He actually showed us what true love is like- humble, and self-giving, and pure. He said to his followers 'Love one another, in the same way as I have loved you.'

Tammy: And we can't love like that unless we ask God for his help every day.

Carol: It's time for us to go now. And as always, we would love to hear from you. We do hope you will be with us again. Have a great week filled with God's blessings.

Marli: Goodbye from me too, my friend.

Tammy: And may God bless you and hold you in his love.

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