Nurturing Positive Attachments with Firmness and Love
Nia House Parent Meeting, December 1, 2018

The parent meeting topics always stem from the questions asked during parent-teacher meetings and conversations about how best to support young children and family practices. This topic comes up in nearly every conversation- where is the firmness and love “line” and how does it effect my attachment(s)?

GOALS:
* to acknowledge LONG TERM value of supporting human development, beginning in early childhood.

* to celebrate the joys and challenges of family growth, and to assist with identifying and removing obstacles for families and children.

* to define and interpret key terminology on the topic.

* to learn from experts including but not limited to Maria Montessori and the experiences and best practices of other families.

* to empower families to make new decisions or shift process to serve the changing needs of growing children.

* to practice firm boundary setting with all aspects of love and the vision of lifelong skill building!

What is a bond?  What is Attachment?
What is Firmness and what is Love?

* John Bowlby devoted extensive research to the concept of attachment, describing it as a "lasting psychological connectedness between human beings." His work was followed by Mary Ainsworth’s “strange situation study” where she assessed parent child attachments through a sequence of separation and reunification.

Large Group Brainstorm
  a. What are the key ingredients to form bonds and attachments?
  a. What are your family’s highest value outcomes of forming bonds and attachments?

2. Setting limits and boundaries with firmness and love-
  a. Clear limits and boundaries support family attachments with all family members knowing what is expected, rather than the alternative of feeling “told what to do.”
  b. What are your family/ personal limits and boundaries vs. your wants- your “musts” lists?
  c. What can you do to exercise your “calm firm” limit as a muscle?
  d. Nobody really wants to hear “no.” How can you add compassion to your limit with empathy?
Large Group Brainstorm:
   i. What are effects of limit setting on the child?
   ii. What are effects of limit setting on the adult?

2. Personal obstacles exist which can feel limiting in the forming of bonds and attachments (time, guilt, work, safety needs, personal parent basic needs, parent emotional needs....)

3. Cultivating bonds and attachments helps define senses of “we” and “me.” We have explored through area of study of practical life- care of self, others, environment. I am capable of... and trusted to take care of myself. Lessons of blowing nose, cutting food allow children to see their own progress and feel trusted. I am NEEDED by my family/ community- to set the table, to help sweep, to serve, to clean...

4. Jane Nelson and colleagues write, “misbehavior based on a sense of not belonging creates a repetitive cycle of destructive feelings and behaviors.” (Positive Discipline for Today’s Busy Parent). Cultivating skills through practical life and nurturing the bond through attachment can address the need to belong.

5. Boundaries help all members of the family nurture their best selves and help ensure safety (emotional and physical boundaries).
   -Separations are one of the many ways we help children find safety in boundaries-consistency.
   Melody Patten in Montessori Life: be confident in your decisions. Be upbeat and positive (even if you’re not fully convinced). Create the routine. Prepare your adult self (young children intuit your concerns). You are all experts. You’ve all accomplished this first step- separating, which is the first step in preparing your child for a lifetime of firsts!

Small Group Breakouts:
   a. What qualities define individuals within the family unit?
   b. What qualities define the collective family unit?
   c. Define your family/ personal boundaries: Physical and emotional and their value.

Take a 10 minute Break

Return from Break to large group
   6. Freedom within limits- Tie back to Montessori
      a. Structure of how children learn- repetition, experimentation, skill building...
      b. How limits/ boundaries offer increased freedom- No need for reminders, nagging, child already knows expectations. Cutting with knives, joining a family meeting or adult conversation, attending a concert, restaurant, movie or other public space...
      c. Limits/ boundaries strengthen and support bonds- all limits can be broken down into areas of practical life study and practice.
      d. Firmness and consistency- keys to freedom within limits, using whole body (energy and voice) should be consistent with effort. Action comes. Less repeating. Prepare, reflect, acknowledge, give choice, take action.
*knowing what you can do and how you can do it is freedom- think about driving analogy (Maren Schmidt)

7. Adult role: find a path through challenging behaviors- Positive discipline; being an observer; stepping back; resisting urges to nag/ comment/ remind…. (putting shoes example)
   a. Many opportunities to strengthen bonds through challenges
      i. Repetition
      ii. Time
      iii. Working together/ collaboration
      iv. Allowing space for autonomy
      v. Offer 2 positive choices: Do you want to do this job fast or slow, with your eyes open or closed, while singing a song or quiet, while touching your nose or your toes….
   b. Using tools of validation/ active listening/ not “fixing” problems
   c. Uncovering developmental needs that inspire behaviors- tie back to positive discipline, resisting urge to say “don’t”, pause, reflect on what the adult can do or how we can change the environment. Toilet paper shredding example- p. 143, Positive Discipline for Preschoolers.
   d. Grace and courtesy- the investment in helping child define self within community and establishing patterns and norms of social connections.

8. Setting the tone of adulthood- charting a path- Mary Ainsworth’s attachment research was instrumental in laying the groundwork for contemporary research that shows that attachments in early childhood can be predictors of patterns of behavior in adulthood. Montessori agrees….

Take a 10 minute break- reconvene in small groups to conclude with role playing with love and firmness, using specific strategies.

Small group brainstorms and role playing:

9. What are some positive family bonding activities and why are they useful? (Contemporary psychological theory notes that for every nag/ reminder/ negative interaction, humans need 5 positives to feel the repair)

Attachment and bonding researcher Laura Markham suggests:
   a. Aim for 12 hugs or physical connections daily.
   b. Play- laughing releases oxytocin and endorphins.
   c. Turn off technology during interactions- lack of eye contact is noticed and modeled by young children, and certainly not a skill you want your teen/ tween modeling back at you!
   d. Connect before transitions.
   e. Make time for one-on one interactions/ fun with each child, even if it’s a short time.
   f. Welcome emotions- crying is ok! It’s a much needed release for many people.
   g. Slow down, chat, and show up in as many moments as you can.

Positive Discipline theorists Jane Nelson and company suggest:
   h. Demonstrating affection, interest and acceptance
   i. Practicing the art of conversation
j. Reading together
k. Encouraging curiosity and safe exploration
l. Limiting television and screen time

10. In the moment, actions to take, what to say (review together, include positive discipline strategies):
   a. Affirm child’s “need” with observation- It sounds like you really want to..... followed by expectation or limit.
   b. Ask a what or why question- What do you need to do first? What do you need to use for your teeth to be super clean? What do you need to take to school if you want to be warm and cozy?
   c. Decide if you can compromise or offer a choice or 2 that meets the underlying need or desire.
   d. Demonstrate compassion- It does look hard to put your xxx away when you’ve worked so hard. Should we write your name on it and save it for later?
   e. Write down positive future expectation or changed expectation based on current action. Legos are open in the afternoons when there is plenty of time to play.
   f. Rudolf Dreikeurs suggests taking action without words- rather than “telling,” “doing.” Make an “I” statement or remove the opportunity/ choice. Stop using language. I will sit down at the table with you after your hands are clean (and bring food then).
   g. Know when to separate or walk away- I am going to go cook dinner while you clean up your toys/ yell in your room....
   h. Use specific positive discipline strategies- see worksheet.

11. **Role play- resolving moments of challenge with firmness and love**- setting up a plan of consistency (while refraining from the nagging/ reminding/ negative interactions, and supporting patterns of preparing, reflecting and acting)