

## From “Trauma through a child’s eyes”

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It is of primary importance that decisions made regarding child custody arrangements when parents separate or divorce be based on the developmental and temperamental needs of the child and not based on what’s convenient for the parents. Children need close contact with both parents. Recent research shows that this is even true for infants and toddlers. Security issues are paramount with babies and very young children. They need to feel safe in order to form healthy attachments. Their task is to trust that the world is a good place and that they are welcomed.

Consistency of routines, sensitive transitions, and regular exposure to *all* attachment figures (including extended family) is best. Babies feel safety through their senses. When they are held, rocked, fed, smiled at, and otherwise nurtured by *both* parents on a daily basis, they will know they are loved by both. You cannot explain with words to a baby that dad will be back next week. The baby needs the comfort of dad’s *physical* presence to know that dad still exists!

As children grow older and begin to separate from their parents, their unique identity is formed through the mirroring given by both parents. When they lose contact with one parent, it is as if a part of themselves is bad, has died or both. Be cautious not to diminish the other parent, as it has the predictable effect of diminishing the self-worth of the child as well. Since both parents live inside the child, whether or not you wish that were so, it *is* the way that it is.