

unmapped territory

Having compassion and empathy for your new baby's introduction to and exploration of their world is a great starting point for any loving parent.

It can be hard for adults to imagine life for a newborn. It's pretty much impossible to imagine a world where everything is new, to imagine what it'd be like if all that we had ever learned was somehow unlearned. I do think it is a useful mental exercise, however, to get into a place of awareness and compassion for the hugeness and newness of life for Baby.

Imagine you've embarked on a trip to a foreign land. Picture yourself in Cambodia, or Tanzania, or Kazakhstan. What's that? You can't picture it because you have no image for the landscape or life in one of those countries? Perfect. Let's begin.

So, you find yourself arriving in a place where you do not speak the language, you can't predict the climate, and you've never experienced the customs. "Should I take my shoes off to enter the building?" "Which fork do I use?" "What are those people doing?"

There is somebody to help: you have inherited a guide. Someone met you at the airport who will be looking after you while you're here. Let's imagine that person. What would we want them to be like? We could hope that our guide is warm and patient. While we cannot

understand their language yet, they could communicate that warmth with facial expressions, tone, and the gentleness of their touch. We could hope for a guide who will work to read our cues, recognising our attempts at communication if we are hungry, thirsty, or tired.

And wouldn't our experience with our guide impact on our experience of the place? Would we enjoy Cambodia if our guide was hurried and impatient? What would we think of Tanzania if our frowning guide seemed mad with us, using a grumpy tone and rough hands? And could we appreciate Kazakhstan if our efforts to ask for a drink were routinely ignored?

can you guess where I'm going with this?

For our new babies, we are the guide. And as challenging as those scenarios may seem (getting off the plane in a foreign land! Yikes!) things are newer and potentially more overwhelming for newborns. Faces are new. Light is new. Trees are new. The feel of clothing on skin is new. And, most importantly, relationships are new.

Our role as carers for new babies - as mothers, as fathers - is hugely important. Research confirms that the more we can support babies in feeling a sense of trust that their needs will be met, the more likely it is that they'll develop a strong sense of trust in the world. This sense of trust is a by-product of a secure attachment relationship and it's no exaggeration to say that it's the greatest gift a parent can give their child. A securely attached child is more likely to grow into an adult who can enjoy relationships, manage emotions, succeed in school and work (and life!).

So, in these early days, wherever possible, allow the space for you and your baby to get to know one another. The hours we spend gazing at our new babies is time very, very well spent. Delegate as many household chores as you can for as long as possible, so that you can take the time you need to rest and spend time with your baby. Slow down. Pay attention. And if it feels like reading Baby's cues is a bit mysterious ("Does this cry mean she's tired? Or hungry?"), know that it's



worth saying out loud to her: "Oh, honey ... I want to help, but I'm not sure what you need right now. I'm here though, and I will stay with you while we figure it out."

This will help lay the foundation for a warm and responsive relationship. What a guide you will be! Guiding Baby not just into a new country, but into this thing called Life.

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