

Health

[BODY OF EVIDENCE]

Holding Patterns

Maternal attachment arms babies for all kinds of growth

By Hara Estroff Marano

NAMES: Meghan and Fiona Joye

AGES: 32 and 7 months

PROFESSION: Bar owner

FOR MEGHAN AND her two daughters (there's also Aine, 2) late afternoons are special. Errands done, dinner cooking, "we just roll around on the floor together." Having kids made her "want to be a better person. I started running, joined the community board. I realized I'm their number one role model. I want them to see me as a leader so they become leaders."

1. VIRTUE'S VOODOO

Simply witnessing acts of kindness (even via video) can sway mom's physiology and behavior. By triggering release of the hormone oxytocin, feelings of moral uplift induced by seeing virtue in action stimulate nursing moms to secrete milk and to hug their tots.

2. BRATS 'N' SPATS

The terrible twos indeed lead to frequent mother-child conflict, and tots with touchy temperaments are especially subject to standoffs. But those with secure attachments go out of their way to restore harmony by compromising and explaining a stubborn stance.

3. TOUGH—BUT TRAINABLE

No matter an infant's temperament, eventual adjustment to

school hinges on the quality of parenting. Researchers find that infants with irritable nervous systems are highly positively affected by excellent parenting—but unusually adversely impacted by poor parenting.

4. IN THE NAME OF LOVE

Maternal love is supported not by oxytocin alone, but also by an elaborate network of brain centers. They light up most intensely in response to an infant's cries of distress, when motherly feelings are complicated by worry and mom tenderly tries to shield baby from her concerns.

5. ATTACHMENT'S LONG ARM

How securely attached you feel influences whether you lean right or left politically, especially on terrorism. Under conditions of threat, the securely attached can maintain compassionate values and support liberal causes. But terror threats deeply spook the skittishly attached, driving them to seek security in hard-line tactics.

Sources: 1. *Emotion*. 2. *Child Development*. 3. *Child Development*. 4. *Biological Psychiatry*. 5. *Psychological Science*.

HAIR/MAKEUP: DAVID GOFORTH