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FAMILY MATTERS

## PARENTING WITH LISA SALMON



# IDEA WITH STRINGS ATTACHED

YOU don't have to babywear and breastfeed to practise attachment parenting - responding to infants sensitively is a big part of it too.

All parents are attached to their children, so isn't attachment parenting just what everyone does already?

To some extent, yes. But attachment parenting (AP) experts believe many parents don't give natural, bond-led child-rearing enough attention, so they're urging mums and dads to think about trying the parenting method.

What is attachment parenting?

The idea behind AP is that, as a child's first few years of life are so important to their development, the best way to meet their needs is to form a secure attachment with them. Some of the basics of AP are natural childbirth, responding immediately to crying, breastfeeding when the child desires it, holding and carrying the baby or wearing it in a sling, and co-sleeping.

However, if parents can't do all, or even one of these things, they can still practise attachment parenting stresses Michelle McHale, founder of Attachment Parenting UK. She suggests that, simply responding to young children sensitively and consistently, using positive discipline, and following their instincts, all counts.

She first discovered AP when her eldest daughter, Izzy, was ultra-attached as a baby. Michelle dealt with her daughter's behaviour by raising her in a "very natural" way, and discovered years later that Izzy had two rare heart defects, which may have explained her strong need for constant touch and closeness.

Three reasons to try AP:

1. It can boost a child's ability to communicate

When parents are sensitive and consistent - key aspects of AP - their children are primed to become naturally independent, self-motivated and are more likely to cooperate and communicate.

"The child's earliest attachments help build the foundations for trusting, healthy adult relationships," says Michelle.

2. Closeness can help development

Research shows being touched and loved is essential to a baby's healthy brain development. A 2014 American study found infants learn language more rapidly when caregivers are very responsive.

"Through nurturing touch and sensitivity to verbal and non-verbal cues, parents can support the development of their baby's prefrontal cortex - the area of the brain responsible for empathy," says Michelle.

3. Positive discipline can improve behaviour

With specific praise and rewards, children can be more adventurous in their learning and develop sound judgement rather than unquestioning obedience, explains Michelle. Positive discipline also recognises that when children feel good, they behave well; punishment is often considered counter-effective. AP is based on the principle that parents treat children the way they would want to be treated, with the ultimate aim of children developing a conscience.

# LOSING WEIGHT HAS TO BE A FAMILY AFFAIR

## HEALTH

With Dr Zak Uddin



FROM pop stars to politicians, most people acknowledge the importance of young people in society, and, that in the words of John F Kennedy: "Children are the world's most valuable resource and its best hope for the future".

However something far more serious than tobacco, alcohol and even recreational drugs threatens to destroy this hope and that is obesity.

Shocking figures demonstrate that in the past 40 years, childhood obesity, defined as affecting young people aged between five and 19, has increased tenfold worldwide.

In the UK, between a quarter and a third of all school age children are either overweight or obese.

While the image of the chubby little schoolboy or girl is not an unpleasant one, the reality is very different.

Long-term obesity is linked to 13 different types of cancers, high blood pressure and heart disease, type 2 diabetes as well as joint and mobility problems.

The effects are not just physical, with anxiety, low self-esteem and even reduced achievement in the workplace and relationship difficulties attributed to the effects of excess weight.

Childhood obesity is strongly linked with adult obesity, so if there is a time to address the problem, it is at the earliest stage. The soft drink and convenience food industries have been heavily criticised with children consuming an estimated half of their daily sugar intake from unhealthy snacks

Such is the strength of feeling



**ON THE COUCH:** Childhood obesity rates are on the rise which could cause alarming health problems later in life such as cancer and diabetes

that in some parts of the country, the Coca-Cola truck, almost as much a part of Christmas as the turkey itself, has been banned.

Roughly speaking, four variables govern the development of obesity.

These include diet, exercise, your relationship with food itself, and genetics.

Only the last one cannot be altered, so although some people have a natural propensity to put on weight, there is still much that can be done to avoid this.

Children are close observers of adult behaviour, so it is likely that the habits you have will influence

those of your offspring. The Change4Life campaign advises that you allow your children no more than two 100-calorie snacks per day.

A full list of these is available online, and for simplicity, there is a now even an app that tells you how many calories there are in an item simply by scanning its barcode.

Healthy eating is a team effort and should be embraced by the family as a whole.

If possible, make meals from scratch, rather than resorting to convenience foods, and include your children in the preparation

and cooking, if safe, so that they develop skills that will hopefully last them a lifetime.

Eat together as a family if practicable, away from distractions such as television, so that your children register the pleasure of eating, and the enjoyment that comes from company.

Portion sizes should be appropriate as overeating even healthy foods will still put on weight.

Lastly encourage your children to exercise regularly; a thirty minute walk together will have you on the right track.

## When will my technicolour bruise disappear?

**Q: I got my leg bumped by a car door in November. It hit it with such force that there was a technicolour bruise that lasted several weeks. I still have a hard lump where the bruise was. Is there anything I can do, or will it just go by itself? - Sheila, 76**

**A: When you get hit hard by any object, there may be damage to blood vessels in the skin which leak, causing the classic bruise. As this blood breaks down, the bruise goes from purple to green and then yellow, before it becomes invisible and the skin looks the same as before.**

**However any damage to the muscle and fat underneath will cause scar tissue to form, which may be the lump you are describing. It is likely that this will disappear or at least reduce on its own over time, although this may take several months.**

**Q: How long should it take to get pregnant? I am worried that I have left it too late. I only met my partner two years ago and we are keen to have a family - Sandy, 37**  
**A: Roughly 85 percent of couples will conceive within 12 months of regular unprotected sexual intercourse, with this number**

**rising to almost 95 per cent at two years. While I acknowledge your concern, many women are having children later on, with career development occupying their 20s. Although there is a greater risk of genetic abnormalities among babies born to older mothers, modern screening techniques can alert you to this early on in pregnancy. There are, however, merits to being a little bit older when starting a family. I would advise you not to put pressure on yourselves. If you haven't conceived after 12 months, you could discuss this with your regular GP who may organise**

**tests if appropriate.**

**If you have a question for Dr Zak, please email: askdoctorzak@gmail.com**

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**Dr Uddin's advice is provided in good faith and in accordance with currently accepted evidence. However, this content is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. You should always seek the advice of a GP, or other qualified health provider, regarding a medical condition.**