

How Trust Develops: An Exploration

An excerpt from Dr. Scott's book, *7 Childhood Treasures*:

"Infancy, the first year of life, is the period in which children develop the capacity to trust. That is not the time when they learn trust in our adult terms; not trust as a construct for whether a person is worthy of our friendship, our love. They learn to trust simply, trust in a foundational way. Babies learn trust as they learn whether the world will respond to their needs, their very simple needs for food, contact and stimulation, rest and sleep, and the elimination of various physical discomforts, from wet diapers to a too-warm room.

"Babies express their needs quite clearly, despite their lack of language, and not just by crying. Infants have a large repertoire of signals and cues that they use to convey what they need. Crying is the most obvious of these signals and it comes in various forms. A responsive, aware parent learns to tell the difference between the cry of hunger, the cry of pain, and the cries of boredom or fatigue. Infants also use facial expressions and body movements to communicate."

Take a look at these three vignettes of infants and the adults in their lives. Answer the questions at the end of each vignette. For a deeper learning experience, share this activity with someone else. After each of you independently read the vignettes and answer the questions, compare your answers and have a dialog about your responses.

Vignettes of Developing Trust

Clara and Dad

Three-month-old Clara, recently awake from a nap, is having her diaper changed by her father. Her eyes are intent upon his face, mapping its familiar landscape with gliding movements from his eyes to his mouth, around its perimeter, and back to his eyes. Dad's gaze is focused purposefully on what he is doing with diapers, wipes, cream and powder. Clara locks her eyes on his averted eyes and emits a little gurgle and the syllable "uh" twice. Dad's eyes stay on his task and, frowning, he mutters under his breath, "Dang her, she's still buying these diapers too small."

- What needs might Clara be communicating? Are they being met by Dad?
- What is one way this story might end – what happens next?
- How is Trust built by Clara in your story?
- What is another way this story might end that would lead to Clara building Trust in a different way?

Jamal, Elmo and Momma

Six-month-old Jamal sits in his high-chair, cuddling a plush toy of Elmo from Sesame Street and watching his mother, who is busy fixing his dinner. Momma drops a saucepan lid that clatters loudly on the counter and Jamal drops Elmo on the floor with a little "Uh-oh!" sound. Momma says, "Jamal, did I scare you? Momma made a bang! Here's your Elmo," as she picks up the toy and hands it to him. As soon as she turns back to dinner, Jamal flings Elmo onto the floor and repeats, "Uh-oh!" Smiling, Momma turns around and says, "Uh-oh? Uh-oh! Elmo fell again!" She picks up the toy and returns it to Jamal.

- What needs might Jamal be communicating? Are they being met by Momma?
- What is one way this story might end – what happens next?
- How is Trust built by Jamal in your story?
- What is another way this story might end that would lead to Jamal building Trust in a different way?

Maria and Grandma

For more than an hour, four-week-old Maria has been the object of everyone's joy at the Thanksgiving table. Passed from relative to relative, she has been dandled and petted, jiggled and rocked, smiled at and cooed to. Her grandmother holds her now, big hands wrapped around her ribcage under her armpits and strong index fingers supporting her wobbly head, as the rest of her body dangles in the air. Grandma kisses her nose over and over, chirping, "Waddawiddewcutie!" between each kiss. Maria turns her head firmly to one side, averting her face as far from Grandma's as possible. Grandma turns Maria's body to bring her face back into view and begins the kissing and chirping again. Maria turns her head firmly the other direction, as far as it will go.

- What needs might Maria be communicating? Are they being met by Grandma?
- What is one way this story might end – what happens next?
- How is Trust built by Maria in your story?
- What is another way this story might end that would lead to Maria building Trust in a different way?

Memories of Early Childhood

How can you know whether you built a healthy Treasure of Trust in your first year of life? You likely do not remember experiences like this from your earliest months of life. However, stories you've heard, your memories of later childhood, and your observations of your parents now can provide you with a good sense of how well they may have met your needs in your first year of life.

Are there family stories about how every time you cried, you were brought into your parents' bed? Are there stories of how you were a happy baby, always laughing or always "easy going?" These are cues that your needs were met. Or are your parents' stories of listening to you cry for long periods of time, or about how you were always hungry or demanding attention? Are the memories of you about how "willful" you were? These are cues that your needs were not met.

You may want to reflect on memories you have from later years, of times when you needed your parents' attention or support, or when you were in emotional distress. Was your need for attention, support or comfort met?

Finally, notice now how your parents respond to the expressed needs of infants. If there are grandchildren or other babies in the family now, notice how your parents are at meeting these infants' needs for care, support, and comfort. How well do they read their cues and signals? Are they focused on following the baby's leads, or are their responses more about their own needs and desires?

All these reflections and observations can provide you with some sense of how your very simple needs were met in infancy. This awareness may help you understand the strength and stability of the Treasure of Trust you built back then.