

Most people will describe parenting as a very big job for which there is little preparation. We were all the recipients of some kind of parenting -- good, bad or indifferent.

Tragically, some children have faced the worst kind of parenting through neglect and abuse. We do know the kind of parenting we receive as children can shape our life experiences. Parenting is not specific to biology. Non-biological parents come forward to parent children due to all kinds of circumstances.

The big question is: "What makes one action 'parenting' and another action common concern for a child's well-being?"

This is hard to define but there are clues. One important piece of information in determining "who is a parent" is the relationship between the child and the adult caregiver. This doesn't mean "do they get along well" but rather is there a bond between them.

The primary connection for each of us is formed between a biological mother/father and their child. Studies tell us that attachment is formed in the womb and increases in intensity at birth when the newborn is completely dependent on a caregiver to survive.

There is significance to the biological connection that has relevance throughout a person's life but we have to acknowledge that, in the absence of biological connections, attachment can be forged at various ages from new life to late teens and is a critical need throughout life. It is also true that biology is not a guarantee of attachment and we have many examples of parents not achieving attachment with their children.

Total dependence on our parents is a fact of life for human babies. Children do not survive without care. Healthy attachment is formed when the child feels wanted. When a child's needs are met a feeling of security and safety develops, establishing a secure attachment with parents/caregivers.

Children look to their parents to define themselves. If the parent is loving, attentive and present, the child develops a sense of self-worth. When attention, love and care are withheld, the child feels worthless and insecure.

Most of us can relate to the loving gaze between a mother and child during feeding. That eye contact has the power of an electric current and carries through it a life-long connection that goes beyond any other measure of love.

The most significant act of becoming a parent is the commitment to forming an attachment with your child.

This new life is completely dependent on you to survive. Meet his needs with all the love and attention and care that you have within you as a parent. The time you invest will have a lifetime of dividends for you and your family.

To learn more about the importance of attachment in parenting, consider registering for Connections, offered by the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

Deborah Joyce is the Executive Director of District 69 Family Resource Association serving children, youth and families in Oceanside. Contact her at 250-752-6766.