

Card 5: Maternal Fetal Bonding

Many pregnant women start feeling a bond with their baby when they are shown the baby on the scan or when the baby starts moving inside them. This motivates the mother to eat healthy food, take care of her health and also get adequate rest. This would help her feel relaxed and calm and to stay healthy.

However, sometimes pregnant women may not feel this connection and find it difficult to connect with the baby.



To understand how a mother is developing a relationship with her unborn baby we can ask a few questions, such as:

1. Do you talk to your unborn baby?
2. Do you have a pet name when you talk to your baby?
3. Do you wonder if the baby can hear you from inside?
4. Do you wonder if the baby can feel/think from inside?
5. Do you feel happy when the baby kicks you?

If response is **yes** to most questions, offer supportive words of encouragement.

“You are doing very well!”
“It’s good to check on your unborn baby!”



If she says she is not feeling the connection, you can make the following suggestions:

Encourage the mother to talk to the baby daily. It can include talking about one's daily activity, singing or playing songs, narrating stories when alone or with involvement of the spouse and family members. This helps strengthen the mother-fetus bond and identify the baby as an independent living being.



Encourage her to imagine what she would do when the baby arrives, and how she would take care of its needs.



Encourage her to discuss with her husband how both of them imagine the baby's looks, traits and characteristics they hope it would inherit.



Tell the family that social support enhances maternal and fetal (baby) attachment. Encourage them to:

- Accompany her for regular antenatal visits.
- Ensure availability of healthy and nutritious food .
- Share household chores and responsibilities so that she is not overburdened.



Discuss about how the baby is able to hear and respond to certain stimuli even while in the womb.



Encourage her to ask the doctor to show the scan to her and her husband.

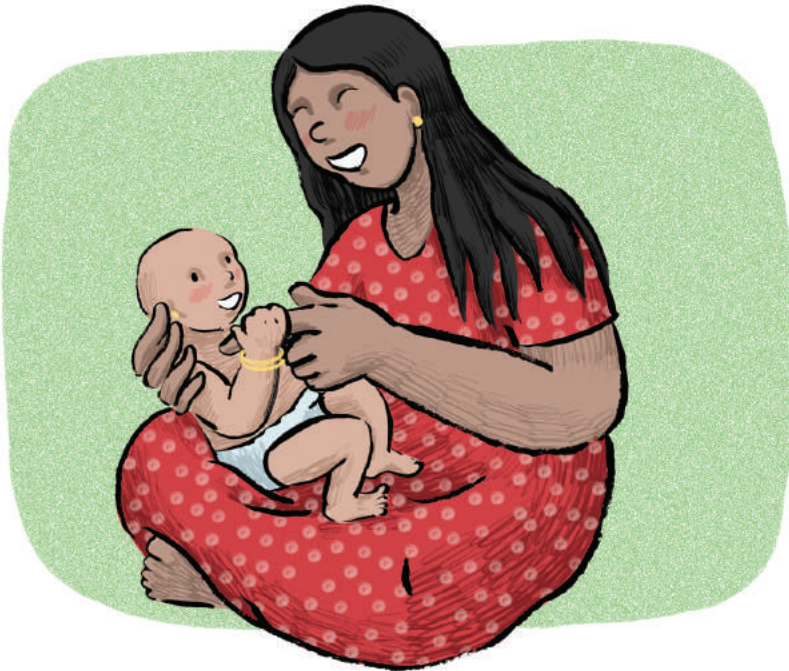


Card 5: Mother-Infant Interaction

Assessing Mother-Infant Interaction

Say “Normal bonding between mother and infant takes some time. The mother has to become familiar with the rhythms and the baby has to feel comfortable with the mother. I would like to ask you a few questions to understand your interaction with your baby better.”

- Does she/he recognize and respond to you?
- Who provides the most care for the baby?
- Does it worry you to leave your baby in the care of anyone else?
- What makes your baby smile or laugh/ cry or upset?
- How do you feel when you are away from the baby?



Helpful Responses

If the mother reports overall satisfaction and contentment with the bond between her and her infant, say “You are doing very well while handling so many new roles and challenges.”

Otherwise mention “You are so used to seeing images and films where mothers feel an instant love and bond with their baby. This is not always true. Many women take time to form a bond with their children. In the first few weeks after birth, feeling exhausted, and weak is common, and even feeding the baby may feel like a huge task. This is normal and you should not judge yourself. It does not mean you are a bad mother.”



Ways to Strengthen Mother-Infant Bonding



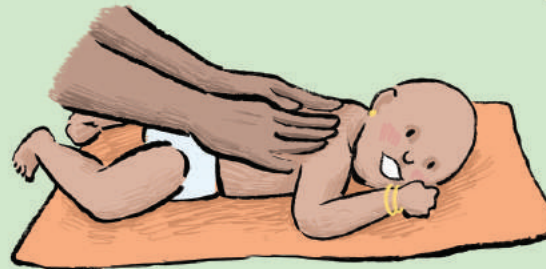
Holding your baby and allowing for skin-to-skin touch makes both of you feel good. Some mothers might have trouble breastfeeding the baby at the start. This is expected. Relax and try different positions that work for you both. Breastfeeding helps a lot in mother-infant bonding. If you find the process stressful, relax and try when you feel less anxious. Discuss your feeding concerns with another mother or the ANM/ASHA.



Take some breaks from infant care with the help of others to rest. Taking some time out for yourself is not wrong.



Listen to the sounds and watch the gestures your baby makes and copy them. Make eye contact with your baby and allow it to see your expressions like laughing and smiling. Your baby might even try to mimic you.



Try giving your baby a very gentle massage at least once a day while talking to your baby.



Try playing with the baby 3 or 4 times every day after feeding, for example, by showing him/her objects from your house or things that are colourful or make sounds that the baby may find interesting.