

## Music Kitchen– The Art of Building a Relationship

How to »nourish« baby's soul and contribute to child's all-embracing development; and about everyday chores that illuminate the path to blossoming

Baby's development is extremely rapid and comprehensive in their first year of life, and the engine of its progress is mostly the relationship primary caregiver establishes with the baby. To make our reader's experience more fluent, I'm using the term 'mother' throughout this essay; and secondly, most of the time mothers are primary caregivers. Talking about the connection a mother has with her baby, we refer to a process that goes both ways – it includes not only adult's capability to perceive, accept and adjust to a baby but also baby's capability to communicate needs, feelings and generally what's going on with them, when seeking to connect with the mother.

Organically speaking, mother's emotional capabilities, cognition, thinking as well as regulating her emotional moods and behavior constitute the necessary space for her baby to grow and develop; but also learn and mold baby's behavior so that later on the baby is able to adjust and find a place of their own in the milieu they grow up in. We can observe how a baby is adjusting by paying attention to how they move, how frequently they cry or turn their little head around, develop eye contact, in short, by observing all their behavioral features.

Mother-child relationship's foundation is shaped by micro-regulation of responding and perceiving, a process during which baby's brain develops main response mechanisms. In his writings, A. Schore elaborately explains why attunement between a mother and her baby is non-verbal, emotional and intuitive right brain attunement (Schore, 2019). A baby evolves by being in emotional attunement with the mother whose sensitivity and sense of awareness, by taking care of her baby, grow deeper, more intense in addition to her emotional processing accelerating.

In other words, this relationship is the foundation of a comprehensive structure constituting baby's way of reacting to the world. Each pattern a baby learns in a dialogue with the mother, opens up new ways of gaining additional experiences and access to other developmental possibilities.

Developmental science (Lerner, v Bornstein and Lamb, 2005, Stern, 2004, Siegel, 2021) explains how to distinguish individual fundamental stages, not just chronologically but also in terms of each phase emphasizing a particular position on the spectrum of mother-child attunement process that expands and improves at every new stage.

Development is always subject to change (Bornstein and Lamb, 2005). In this particular case, we talk about organic change, the change in brain's structure and functioning that consequently affects behavior. But not every change indicates development, in other words if we see a particular change in a baby it doesn't necessarily signify development. Developmental change (understood as actually grasping and internalizing change organically as well as acquiring new patterns permanently) is the kind of change that is organized and systematic in character, so that it can effectively replace and improve already acquired abilities. But sometimes this isn't enough, in other words, not all systematically acquired changes are considered developmental (one such example is conditional reflex; it's not considered developmental because it lacks not only pertinence to baby's internal experience but also an already established relationship, which is typically necessary for developing certain skills). Only when change is systematic and incorporates as well as upgrades all previous stages, or in other words when it affects the whole system, which includes experiencing, comprehending and functioning, we can define it as developmental.

Development(al) is thus a particular kind of change, which is externally visible but also internal, and incorporates everything that happened up to that point; a baby becomes »aware« of a newly-

acquired skill in an organized and systematic manner and is capable to use it independently, »in their own way« in new situations in a meaningful manner (Lerner, Bornstein and Lamb, 2005).

When we talk about what's beneficial for comprehensive development of a baby, we first have to consider what we can expect, realistically – what kind of developmental change is appropriate at a particular stage and will later on help the baby acquire new skills and learn new stuff. Generally speaking, earliest developmental foundations are generated by rhythmical activity, later on by musicality and finally by learning to regulate emotions, in addition to establishing strong attachment and feeling safe with one's primary caregiver(s).

First, let's look at how rhythm develops:

#### FROM BIRTH TO 2-MONTHS OLD

At this age, the relationship between a mother and her baby revolves more or less around feeding, sleeping and comforting. Mother's job is to figure out when her baby is hungry, tired, feels hurt or lonely. In other words, getting to know her baby and learning to regulate the rhythm of baby's life.

At this point, the most crucial decision she needs to make is whether she can trust herself, instead of relying on the clock when it comes to feeding her baby; or whether she trusts her baby to go to sleep when the baby seems tired instead of relying on some external rhythm (daytime, nighttime) to decide when the baby goes to sleep, i. e. she lets her baby sleep when they seem tired instead of waking the baby up in order to – as she might think – teach the baby to get adjusted to the rhythm of exchanging day and night. And thirdly, whether she'll let herself feel the need to connect with her baby, like holding the baby in her lap, look at, pamper and keep the baby close and not let the rules determined by outside world scare her into thinking she should force the baby to get used to being alone, either in a baby carriage or when alone in their bed. By making these decisions, a mother and her baby are designing the system for regulating emotions, or rather what kind of mutual attachment bond they form with regards to baby's emotional and physiological needs; in other words, whether the baby will feel accepted or not for having specific needs, as well as how quickly and aptly baby's mother is able to respond to these needs. On the other hand, we see that a mother needs a lot of emotional space and safety at this stage so that she can immediately sense what her baby needs; in addition to getting to know her baby and build an appropriate kind of attachment. Namely, first few months in baby's life are exclusively devoted to building a relationship with their primary caregiver, by rhythmic activity, the process of emotional attunement and micro-regulation, enacted through feeding/nursing, regulating cycles of sleeping and being awake, and developing a bond of attachment.

At this age, baby's priorities lie in developing skills of social and emotional exchange, seeing parents smiling and acquiring »speech« abilities (Stern, 2004). As we've already said, this relationship is established through the rhythm of feeding and sleeping patterns as well as mutual compassion – mother's for her baby and vice versa. Stern also points out how crucial is mother's ability to attune to her baby feeling hungry; in other words, whether she'll listen to her baby instead of forcing the baby to eat even if the baby isn't hungry; or, if she's able to detect whether the baby is full or just wants a break during feeding. This applies to sleeping as well; is she able to calm her baby to sleep and establish a rhythm of sleeping patterns that are suitable for her baby; and whether she's able to keep calm while performing these activities or is it too overwhelming for her and she isn't able to cope, which ends in responding to her baby's needs negatively, inappropriately or facially expressing a lack of understanding? (Stern, 1985, pg. 300). The rhythm of feeding and sleeping is often interrupted and a baby cries when that happens; that in turn requires a lot of repeating attempts before some

sort of routine is established. At this stage it's very important the parents know how to comfort and calm the baby down as well as how they respond to crying – does it agitate or upset them, do they become apathetic and respond by becoming overly anxious themselves; or maybe they ignore, neglect or let their baby cry for hours and hours instead of responding to baby's needs by being sensitive, spontaneous, creative and flexible (Stern, 1985).

Furthermore, D. Stern describes a hungry baby in a very picturesque way, emphasizing the intensity and rhythmic flow, depending on how aptly a parent responds to their baby feeling hungry.

»Hunger is an extremely intense experience for a baby, as it represents the main motivational drive in baby's life. It permeates baby's entire nervous system like a turmoil, disorganizing prior experience as well as behavior. It disrupts baby's well-being with feelings of chaos and disorder. When a baby is hungry, it's a new type of rhythm inducing different action patterns and emotions. Feeling hungry starts as a slight discomfort but rapidly grows more intense. During this disorganized stage feelings of hunger are becoming increasingly intense, baby's world seems disassociated and fragmented, their perception of it is intermittent. The baby is screaming, using their arms and legs as if trying to reach for something, because hunger is disruptive to baby's overall mood. The change in baby's breathing is extremely disorganized, it's faster, more intense and irregular. Soon after, the baby also activates their voice – crying, but at this point all these elements aren't integrated; likewise, baby's movements aren't synchronized either. Instead, baby's actions are disoriented, uncoordinated and without proper focus. However, as hunger is increasing, inner feelings are more and more localized with feelings of irritation gradually but more clearly articulated as hunger. Crying is less disorganized and becoming more intense and consistent, which helps the baby process feelings of hunger. This type of crying is a clear signal for parents that the baby feels stressed and they need to react appropriately. At the same time, extreme and articulated type of crying helps the baby confront and deal with intense feelings of hunger. Baby's hunger precipitates two actions: how to communicate something to the outside world and deal with what's happening in their inner world« (Stern, 1985).

When a mother hears her baby crying, she'll gently lift the baby to lay on her chest, offer her breast or a bottle, all the while speaking gently to her baby who is sucking vigorously at first and slows down after a while, while constantly looking at mother's face. When getting ready to nurse her baby, she's concurrently introducing four new elements and a new position into her baby's world. The first element is talking, which serves, first and foremost, to calm the baby down. A mother is usually talking when she's trying to calm down or getting ready to nurse the baby; words at this point aren't important, it's more about musicality and the sound of her words. Mothers instinctively know when they need to calm the baby lest they become too agitated to eat. The next element is touching, for example holding the baby in her lap. The third is changing position by lifting the baby from her lap to lean on her shoulder, cheek-to-cheek. This is one of the most powerful and effective ways to calm a baby. Even later in life, when an adult is feeling stressed they have the need to hug someone in a similar fashion because this action conveys two powerful messages: from a physiological point of view, this position is calming, getting closer to someone's face yields feelings of safety and warmth in our nervous system; and from a mental point of view, we are more attentive to what we see and hear. The combination of physical closeness and upright position allows a baby to feel the world is settling down and getting more relaxed. Finally, the fourth element is movement. Walking and holding a baby is soothing and abates the intensity of crying. Already after first few months, a baby learns how to manage stress in stressful situations – by leaning on another person who takes care of them, by looking around, finding their own rhythm... All this helps a baby when they're feeling stressed, to learn (how) to trust and rely on mother's care that she'll find a way to make them feel better (Stern, 1985). At this point, a baby starts to develop more distinct and specifically aimed

expectations. By detecting these repeating patterns, stemming from situations such as a baby feeling hungry and mother responding to baby's stress, the baby learns that stressful situations can end if they're fed.

In their third month, baby's assumption about what happens next time they feel stressed, is even more elaborate. Sucking is nothing more than a reflex and all babies follow a similar pattern - they always suck hastily at first, then slow down, take a break, then the other breast and sucking is more intense again, then another break... But, every baby establishes their own rhythm, which is unique, just like a finger print. At first, they drink hastily to calm down initial tumultuous hunger, but when their brain receives the message that the food has arrived, they become more relaxed and pay less attention to feeding; instead, the baby starts paying attention to the world around them. Now the baby can drink, watch and listen all at the same time, while initially they're only interested in drinking. Mothers usually acknowledge this pattern but have to sense intuitively how firmly they should encourage their baby to eat everything before they move on to playing; they can also play while feeding if the baby manages to involve them into some sort of playful interaction but that usually means they won't finish their meal (Stern, 1985, Siegel, 2021).

At this stage, babies have different levels of awareness, for example sleeping, napping, resting, crying and being either actively awake or acutely hungry. These dispositions are separate from each other and a baby jumps from one into another, meaning this doesn't happen gradually. Each is like a new step going up or down a staircase.

When a baby is fed, they're instantly back in their own world again, observing mother's face from an appropriate distance to see it as clearly as possible (20–30 cm). Moreover, a human face is ideally designed to incorporate everything a baby loves looking at most.

A baby is in a state of attunement when they feel inner pleasure and are in close proximity to mother's face. In other words, baby's inner pleasure (f)actually depends on observing mother's face; moreover, baby's reactions have a reciprocal effect on the mother as well, namely, she's more elated and her face gets more lively.

Association of elements in this satisfaction-comfort-(re-)animation cycle along with mother's immediate presence, her face and her actions, takes place in the present; but at the same time, it is precisely these moments that lay foundations for baby's and mother's future expectations that yearnings and hopes are built on. It is these moments that facilitate baby developing mental models or imprints of their mother (Schore, 2019, Folden Palmer, Tronick, 2007). In this process, mother-model is built from many smaller pieces that (in)form their relationship; one of those pieces is feeding, for example. A baby forms their own ideas about what it means to have a connection with or empathy to others, based on elementary functions such as their mother feeding them; while later on in life these models or imprints become prototypes for what they (think they can) expect with regards to relationships with other people they (will) love. In other words, this is what one's attachment style will be based on (Bowlby, 1990).

At this age, the baby thus learns to regulate hunger, sleeping, being awake and listening to (mostly) mother's voice, which is how a baby synchronizes with their own environment's rhythm and melody that in turn become fundamental in acquiring all other skills. At birth, babies are very open-minded. Despite their genetic matrix however, a baby will develop according to stimuli they receive from their adult environment. A baby cannot develop on their own, for their development to occur, it is necessary they have relationships with adults (Bornstein, Lamb, 2005).

## 1. Attunement in face-to-face play

### BETWEEN MONTHS TWO AND FOUR

Baby's vocalization is a very important step at this stage. Stern (1998) claims that a baby between 8 and 12 weeks old usually accomplishes a dramatic jump in their development due to sudden blossoming of baby's capacities for social interaction: the so-called social smile appears, the baby attempts to pronounce syllables and seeks eye contact. A baby thus becomes social almost overnight even though their social skills are limited to »face-to-face« and »now-between-us« relations. Seeking this type of connection dominates in first six months of baby's life as a manner of establishing and maintaining relationships with others, especially when vocalization and »dialogue« gradually enter into play. Later on and throughout adulthood, this skill is fundamental for acquiring the ability to decipher social keys. To a baby, a human face is the most attractive thing that exists due to special rules that apply to it, and special power it wields, which a baby learns to recognize precisely in their first six months of life, during which whatever a baby learns about a human face and its expressions, they carry these imprints with them into their adulthood. Individual sensations and intentions are easiest to recognize; even as adults, when looking at someone, their intentions are most easily recognized by observing their face. And the reason why humans are experts in this exercise is because they learn and practice this skill from the moment they're born. In other words, for a baby looking at someone's face brings more pleasure than looking at anything else (Stern, 1998).

Mother's face for example, is designed in a way that attracts baby's attention more than anything else: for instance, a baby prefers curvy to straight lines (eyebrows and cheeks), light-dark contrasts (an eye), sharp to dull angles (the corner of an eye), is fascinated by vertical symmetry (left and right halves of a face). At this point, compared to a six weeks old baby, they're also more captivated by movement and listening (lips during talking). Moreover, parent's face is not just another living thing; it's actually responsive to baby's actions at every moment; and the baby learns to comprehend how it feels to have this special bond with someone. Lastly, after two or three months a human face gains some sort of special powers and it's a trigger for the baby to try and acquire skills of social smiling and vocalization (Stern, 1998) so they gradually start building a connection with someone based on vocalization.

Another important skill a baby is able to acquire, is staring, which at this point the baby is already capable of just like an adult. Applying this skill, a baby can start and end face-to-face interaction at will since these interactions are based on mutual staring (Stern, 1998). This can also be defined as gaze control, smiling response and vocalization. Schematically speaking, at this age a baby is able to decipher a variety of facial expressions and aptly respond by regulating their behavior accordingly. This is why at this age the mechanism of affection regulation with its specific traits gets more firmly and deeply established (Tronick, 2007). In the process of regulating facial interactions when communicating with an adult, a baby quickly takes the initiative; for example, trying to facilitate interaction by showing a big smile, or reject interaction by distinctly turning away (Stern, 1998). According to Stern, this type of communication is called "face-to-face play" (Stern, 1998, pg. 57). In this particular period, a mother and her baby look at each other a lot; sometimes mother's look seems absent and lifeless, and in such moments the baby feels lost, scared, seeking a site that feels alive and they could escape to, such as eyes, which can transform into the softest as well as the hardest place in their world – a baby staring into mother's eyes gradually brings back liveliness to her face. They can also start playing with different facial expressions, for example the baby starts "pulling faces" and laughs if the mother responds in the same manner, i. e. by also pulling faces; or when the baby calls her and she responds, then they call each other, or lead and follow each other;

or when she comes closer with her nose, and the baby closes their eyes, feeling happy. But if the mother is not enthusiastic enough, the baby will sense that and feel torn between joy and fear, but might also start to quiver and resist. When this happens though, mothers usually notice and stop with playing, or try and calm the baby with a gentle smile (Stern).

A three months old baby thus already knows what to expect from engaging in facial interactions with their mother.

## 2. The social world appears

AT FOUR AND A HALF MONTHS – THE SOCIAL WORLD; (Stern, 1998, pg. 47).

Babies perceive looking into someone's eyes as windows into one's soul, which is very obvious when playing hide-and-seek. A baby is truly happy only when they can see the eyes, meaning »if you can't see my eyes, you can't see me«. If a baby can't see mother's eyes, it means she's gone. Moreover, a baby loves this game so much precisely because mother appears over and over again. To see means looking in the eyes. Eyes are more important for establishing a connection than anything else, for the baby as well as the adult; it seems almost as if a baby “drinks” out of that established eye contact to get what they need for their development and to learn how to understand the world.

Baby's most important goal at this point is maintaining this experience; their gaze can attract and direct mother's gaze. Later in life, this is the foundation for feeling in love and »communicating without words« that love poetry speak so highly of; but it's actually established as one of our earliest experiences, namely being able to create the world with our gaze.

Furthermore, a baby is captivated by the gaze yet at the same time, limited to social events happening »now-between-us«; or rather, even if a baby might be interested they're not able to reach beyond their immediate condition(ing). In their first five or six months, babies are literally confined to their non-verbal interpersonal world because they cannot independently move or sit up straight...

Later on however, babies start seeking various objects and acquire their own agency; for example, they move their head and the scenery changes, they close their eyes and the world goes dark, they move their arm and can feel their muscles or switch to a different position. By performing these actions they acquire their own agency but also realize they are physically separated from their mother – they're no longer one with her, i. e. they realize their actions and feelings are separate from their mother's.

A baby is gradually able to absorb more from the world around them providing they have the opportunity to observe adults in their approach to reducing stress and discomfort. Slowly babies begin to recognize and memorize most common features as distinct images; for example, their mother smiling when coming into the room if the baby is crying, or an image of a hateful and unpleasant face. A baby starts to learn how to distinguish situations in which mother's entrance brings either joy or a painful experience. Early experiences mostly develop in two directions, either pushing people away or persuading them to come closer. These images become a constant in baby's expectations regarding their emotional world, and also help the baby assume or predict what is going to happen and what their best response is to what's happening.

## 3. Emotional world (h)as a melody; building relationships using our voice

## FROM FIVE TO NINE MONTHS OLD

Six months old baby is already able to distinguish which emotions the(ir) family »allows«, understands and find soothing; the baby is able to express anger, sadness, fear, joy, enthusiasm, disgust and anxiety quite clearly, while at the same time, they've learned how their environment responds to various sensory perceptions. Experiencing emotions is physically extremely stressful, especially for babies, and for baby's ability to develop skills of emotional and stress regulation it is crucial what parents do when trying to calm their baby and soothe stressful emotional moods.

In the first six months of life, a baby gradually starts to feel various sensations; furthermore, by observing parent's responses the baby is improving their own mechanism for facing stressful situations and adopt it for the rest of their life. For example, a baby with parents who respond to crying immediately, tend to baby's needs without delay, carefully monitor and take their baby seriously, will seem quite »mature« at six months; i. e. be able to use facial expressions for communicating a broad range of (emotional) experiences, or display early signs of understanding the concept of »patience« because they trust parents will take care of them, for instance conveying their needs by »screaming« less, smiling more and crying less, but also being quick in using gestures to communicate, shout, cheer and the like (Tronick, 2007, Schore, 2019, Erdman Caffery 2003).

Likewise, a six months old baby is already able to improve on their communication skills regarding misunderstandings and misattunement in relationships with adults; they communicate with the world around them, using their whole body, send messages about how they feel, what they need and how we can reach out to them, enter their world as well as invite the baby into our own. This is how we can build a bond of attachment, fundamental trust and understanding about what the world, the baby was born into, is like. We can also teach a baby about relationships and their context, and the whole world this baby was born into; what types of sensations are acceptable to display out there and to what degree a baby is allowed to co-create this world. Lastly, at this age a baby is particularly enthusiastic about sounds, like singing or vocally responding to mother's encouragements.

A baby slowly and gradually learns to distinguish what comes from outside and what comes from within; and it is precisely this particular distinction that lays the foundation for developing our sense of responsibility and self-confidence as well as (self-)control later on. Sensitive parenting means helping the baby learn how to recognize distress and knowing how to comfort the baby, which results in our baby being capable to take on demanding tasks quite early on, for example how to simultaneously control feelings, maintain contact with adults and handle objects in their environment (Tronick, 2007).

The easiest way to develop all these abilities is while playing, which is why at this stage babies play with their parents a lot; moreover, playing with their baby allows the adult to be utterly creative and express creativity without (social) limitations; and that is of utmost importance because one is able to explore one's self only if allowed to be creative (Winnicott,1996).

Playing:

- stimulates growth, development
- is very natural
- is characterized by particular spontaneity, creativity, it's pleasant and brings joy

- is a generator of social relationships

The relationship a mother established with her baby, needs to allow room for interplay, of a mother with her baby, while also enjoying in it (Winnicott, 1996). Another important factor that Stern would add, is regulating playing activity when these two worlds intertwine. A mother who plays with her baby, is very cautious while trying to adapt to her baby's way of playing. But sooner or later she will bring her own game into play because she realizes her way of playing is different from her baby's. The baby however, might or might not like these new ideas coming from the outside world, and even if the baby doesn't like it they might accept mother's way of playing anyway, especially if she insists (or rather, the baby has no choice but to accept it) (Winnicott, 1971).

At this stage, with lots of mutual playing, mothers and babies play together with various objects because the baby already developed sufficient coordination skills to engage in activities such as eye-hand or hand-hand and shows visible interest in the outside world. Another thing that's important is how a parent and a baby synchronize direction, time, space, focus, execution, development, changes and when it's time to stop playing. It also brings back some of the issues parents were dealing with a few months prior, namely feeding and face-to-face play (Stern, 1985) but this time around it brings completely new quality and potential.

Lastly, this stage is also a test, one of the most difficult for a mother because her baby expects spontaneity, relaxed behavior and creativity but sometimes playing can be quite challenging for an adult. Getting some help while engaging in creative playing and co-creating a colorful and open-minded world is thus very welcome, especially when it incorporates elements, which can actually boost developmental changes to occur. Musical artwork for babies, and in particular a radio play that involves looking at mother's face, anticipates her engagement, and includes rhythmic activities, melodic patterns as well as surprises the baby will enjoy – it's the kind of support that helps in everyday life to strengthen those most gentle and deepest bonds of attachment as well as reduce adult's anxiety and uncertainty.

»Music Kitchen« for babies older than six months expertly reinforces adults' efforts when playing with their baby, based on previously established, positive and mutually determined relationship, that was constituted in the process of feeding and can help a mother and her baby expand their comfortably safe relationship with the help of a playful dialogue.

Music will get through to a baby by mother's performing of various activities in the background, as part of an ambiance, while at the same time it also brings other protagonists into play, so not only mother's face and her voice, but also a spoon and a bowl for example, which are objects already very familiar to her baby who is able to understand what kind of role these object play in their lives, as well as creating an experience of building a relationship between a mother and her baby that is interesting, varied, relaxed and playful.