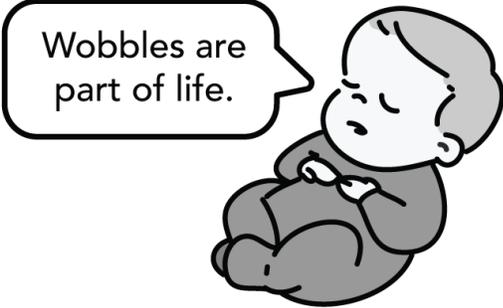




All Relationships Wobble Sometimes



Figuring It Out Together

All relationships have wobbles. It may feel as if you and your child are dancing to different music or at different speeds, or it may feel as though you are dancing on unsteady ground.

Wobbles can happen at any age. All parents feel them, and children do too.

Reasons for Wobbles

Wobbles are part of life. In some cases, it may take only a few steps for you and your child to get back into your special rhythm with each other.

Other times, you may feel out of sync for days or weeks or even months. You may not even be aware of the reason why it is happening, but you notice that you and your child are no longer dancing like partners. You feel disconnected. When this happens, it is important to talk with someone. Your home visitor can help you think about what is going on, and together you can decide what steps to take. You may have other people you can connect to for support. Every parent needs support sometimes. A wobble is one of those times.

Here are some common causes of wobbles:



You didn't fall in love at first sight.

People often talk about falling in love at first sight with their newborn baby. While this is true for many parents, it is not the case for many others. It can take time to love a new little person in your life – one who cries and wakes you up and who needs his diaper changed all the time. Needing time is natural.



You are experiencing baby blues.

If you have just given birth, you may have mood swings, feel down, irritable, tired, sad, or impatient. You may even have trouble sleeping, despite the fact that you are exhausted. These *postpartum blues* are very common. The blues can make it hard to enjoy and respond to your baby.

Don't feel alarmed. Many new mothers (i.e., 50-80%) experience the blues. Fathers, adoptive parents, and foster parents can also experience the blues.

Usually, baby blues tend to lessen in a 1 or 2 weeks. The key is to recognize the signs. Get as much rest as possible; accept the help of family and friends; talk with other new parents; and avoid alcohol and recreational drugs, which can make mood swings more intense.



You are experiencing postpartum depression.

If the blues don't disappear after a few weeks, or become more intense, you may be experiencing postpartum depression. Postpartum depression most commonly affects mothers within the first 3 months after giving birth but can occur at any point during the first year.

Not only mothers can feel depressed after welcoming a new child to the family—fathers and adoptive parents can experience it too.

If you think you are depressed, talk with your home visitor to find out about available supports in your community. Arrange to talk with your health care provider. There are treatments, including talk therapy and medications, that can help. The sooner you get support, the sooner you will feel like yourself again, and you will be able to enjoy your baby.



SAFETY ALERT: At any time, if you feel you may hurt yourself or your baby, put your baby in her crib or another safe place and call for help right away.



Your child may not be who you imagined.

For example, she may not look like the baby you have pictured. She may have a disability – emotional or physical. Her curly red hair might remind you of your cousin who cannot keep a job, or her insistence to do things her way may remind you of your ex-partner whom you hope to never see again. She may not be cuddly. Not all children are.



You may want to be a different parent than you had and worry you don't know how.

For example, your parents may have hit you when you did something they didn't like, and now your 2-year-old is pushing your buttons. You have already taken the first step: realizing you want to be different. Now, it will take work and support to find your own parenting style. Knowing what you don't want to do is not the same as knowing what you do want to do.



You may be stressed out in other areas of your life.

There are many factors that could be influencing your stress level: trying to balance parenting with school or work, getting settled in a new home and community, being away from family, caring for an older relative, or expecting or caring for a new baby while also looking after older children. Give yourself permission to slow down – you do not have to do everything. Reach out to someone in your circle of support to talk to or take a moment to breathe.



Here are Some Ideas to Support Your Relationship

Make sure home visits work for you.

You and your home visitor are partners in making visits helpful. If and when you are feeling a wobble, tell your home visitor. Sometimes, just knowing you are not alone is enough. Other times, you can make a support plan with your home visitor for you and your child.



Give yourself some time.

Some children's ages and stages may be easier than others for you to appreciate and enjoy.



Be aware of your individual styles or temperament.

Each of us is born with our personal way of being. For example, you or your child may be described as one of the following:

- Flexible or Adaptable: You take things in stride - most of the time
- Feisty or Intense: You react in big ways - most of the time
- Thoughtful or Cautious: You watch before joining in. It takes time for you to adjust to new people, places, and activities - most of the time

When it comes to temperament, there is no good or bad or right or wrong. Yet, you may find your child's temperament challenging to handle. For example, if you are easy going, you may feel mismatched when your feisty and intense infant screams louder than you ever knew a baby could scream when she is hungry.

Understanding each of you is an individual can help you begin to appreciate your baby for who she is, which is a big step to connecting.



Take steps to see, accept, and appreciate your one-of-a kind child for who she is.

Watch her with your home visitor. What do you notice? What does your child say or do that makes you smile? What interests her? What makes her happy? What upsets her? What are five things she has learned in her short life? What is she working on learning now?



Figure out ways to adapt your dance steps to fit hers.

For example, some babies and children do not like to cuddle. They may stiffen their bodies or push away from you when you try to hold them close. It is who they are; this reaction is not a rejection of you. Be creative. Find ways to show your love: lay your baby on your lap and gently rub her back, play horsey by bouncing her on your lap, or kiss a toddler on the head.



Support your child's use of a lovey.

Does your child hold onto or carry around a soft object, for example a stuffed animal, a blanket, or one of your t-shirts? This is a *lovey* or transitional object. Its feel and smell give your child the safe and secure feelings of being with you. Keep track of her *lovey* and be sure she has it with her when you are apart – whether for the night or day or longer.

If your child doesn't have a *lovey*, think of other ways to help her carry feelings of your love and trusting relationships with her. For example, give her a photo of you together to keep in her pocket or put a love note in her cubby or tape it to the wall by her bed.



Create a place(s) to be together at home.

Do you and your child have a special place where you cuddle together?
Read together? Play together?

Perhaps you spend time together in a comfy chair or on the living room rug. Maybe, you read or tell a story each night in a rocking chair before your child goes to sleep.

These are places that are filled with the safe feelings that come from you being together. They are places to enjoy each other's company and places that will provide feelings of security and comfort when you and your child are in sync and when your relationship is wobbly.