

Baby A

Baby A is on her back on a blanket in the middle of the floor. Her mother, also on the floor, sits in front of her and is leaning over looking into her eyes. They are playing a little game. Baby goes "agggg" and laughs. Mother imitates her. Baby repeats the sound. Then her mother goes "agggg" and clicks her tongue three times. Baby imitates her sound exactly, waving her arms toward her mother's face. The only sound in the house is of the two voices.

The phone rings, shattering the stillness and interrupting their play. The mother says to her baby, "There's the phone. I have to go answer it. I'll be right back." She gets up as she speaks, picking up a toy as she does so. She

shakes the toy, which has a bell in it, and when the baby's eyes grasp the toy, she sets it down by the baby's face within easy reach. She moves quickly away and out the door. The baby's face clouds up as she watches her mother's retreating back. When she disappears, the baby lets out a loud howl. "Yes, yes, I know you don't want me to leave. I'm right here in the other room. I'll be back." The sound of her mother's voice temporarily reassures the baby, and she turns her attention to the toy by her ear.

If we follow this mother around for a whole Saturday (she works during the week), we find that she and her baby spend periods together and periods apart. The mother values "time to herself" and feels the baby needs privacy and "alone time" as well, so she arranges the day that way.

Here are the ways the baby gets alone time: she sleeps in her crib in her room during her two naps, and she spends time by herself on the floor and is sometimes in a playpen while her mother is occupied elsewhere in the house. She's also away from her parents periodically in the evening. They get a babysitter and go out fairly often because they need "couple time."

Although Baby A is apart from her mother regularly, when they are together, her mother often gives her full attention to her daughter, as in the previous scene. She talks to her, plays little games with her, shows her toys, and responds to what the baby initiates. She spends "quality time" with her.

This mother thinks about attachment. She's aware of the term and of its importance. She knows that attachment comes from being sensitive to her daughter. She understands the importance of interactions in promoting attachment. She knows that she is her daughter's primary attachment. The baby's father is also part of the picture, and the baby is attached to him, too, but prefers her mother when both parents are together.

The mother feels confident that putting her daughter into child care has not hurt their attachment. She knows that her daughter recognizes her, and she has noticed that the child responds to her differently than she responds to the caregivers in the program. Once in a while she worries that her daughter will become too attached to one of the caregivers, but then she recognizes that this is just normal jealousy on her part—mothers are supposed to be possessive. She is able to reassure herself that in the long run, she's the one who really counts.

Baby B

Now look at Baby B. She is on her grandmother's lap, sitting up, looking outward. She slumps over and contentedly sucks and nibbles on her grandmother's arm, glancing up occasionally to look at the people in the room. Her grandmother is having a conversation with her mother, who is sitting on the other end of the couch. The baby's aunt is sewing in one corner of the room,

and two cousins are watching TV in another corner. Now and then the baby makes a fussing sound, and the grandmother jiggles her or strokes her back without taking her attention away from the conversation she's deeply engrossed in.

The TV watchers leave the room, and the grandmother gets up and turns down the volume, taking the baby with her on her arm. As the grandmother walks back toward her seat, the baby's mother holds out her arms, and the grandmother deposits the baby in her lap. The children come back in and turn up the volume of the TV again. The mother rocks the baby, matching the rhythm of a commercial on the TV.

The phone rings. The mother gets up and answers it. She holds the baby while she's talking on the phone, but when the baby starts to fuss, the aunt gets up from her sewing machine and comes to take the baby out of her arms, walking her around the room, bouncing her gently.

The baby quickly falls asleep in her aunt's arms. The woman carefully puts her down on the couch beside the grandmother. She goes back to her sewing machine and in a few minutes announces to one of the TV watchers, "Well, your dress is done—just in time for the party tonight. Go try it on." That rouses the rest of the group, who get up and leave the room, presumably to start getting ready. Only the grandmother is left in the room, sitting by the baby on the couch until the mother comes to relieve her. The mother arrives from the other room, bringing the special outfit the baby will wear to the party.

This baby is never alone. She is always in someone's arms or near them. When the family goes somewhere, she goes too—like to the party they're all getting ready for.

The family thinks very little about this baby's attachment. There's always been a baby or two in the house and always plenty of people to take care of them. The concept of infant attachment isn't something this family worries about.

This baby has multiple caregivers, and the mother sees it as an asset, wondering what she'd ever do if she were the only one responsible for her baby. She shudders at the thought.

In this family, the attachment issues (though they don't call them that) lie beyond infancy. The concern of the older family members is not about whether the babies are attached or not, but how to keep the generation that has just reached adulthood tied to the family when so many forces pull it away. It's a special worry for the grandmother, who has one son in college in another city. Will he come back when he becomes a lawyer? And her youngest daughter recently married a man who is in the service. So far she is still at home, but when her husband is stationed someplace where she can join him, what will happen? If you had to describe Baby A's family and compare it to Baby B's family, what would you say? Look at *Point to Ponder* 5.1 to see what a class of community college students said when given that assignment.