

Trust in Action

by L. Carol Scott, PhD

Infancy, especially the first six months of life, is the period in which children develop the capacity to trust. That is not when they learn trust as a construct for whether a person is worthy of friendship or love. That adult definition comes much later.



Infants learn to trust in a foundational way. Newborns' apparently very simple needs for food, contact and stimulation, rest and sleep, and the elimination of various physical discomforts, from wet diapers to a too-warm room, are not always simple to meet. And they *are* basic survival needs. Without someone to meet these needs, newborn humans *will* die. So, babies learn to trust as a process, through their experiences of whether the world responds to their needs for help with survival.

And babies clearly express these needs, despite their lack of language. Infants have a large repertoire of signals and cues to convey their needs, including facial expressions and body movements. Crying is the most obvious of their signals and it comes in various forms. A responsive, aware adult learns to tell the difference between the cry of hunger, the cry of pain, and the cries of boredom or fatigue.

Yet not all adults caring for infants are aware and responsive. Love and best intentions are interrupted by so much.

Three-month-old Clara, recently awake from a nap, is having her diaper changed by her father. Her eyes are intent upon his profile, mapping its familiar landscape with gliding movements from his eyes to his mouth, around its corner, and back to his eyes. Dad's gaze is focused purposefully on his silent work with diapers, wipes, cream, and powder. Clara locks her eyes on his averted eyes and emits a little gurgle and the syllable "uh." Then, "uh-uh." (This is Clara's current name for this giant being she so loves and reveres). But Dad's eyes stay on his task and, frowning, he mutters under his breath, "Dang her, she's still buying these diapers too small." Clara's hello is unseen and unheard, ignored. **Need not met.**

Seven-month-old Jamal sits in his high-chair, cuddling a plush monster and watching his mother, who is busy fixing his dinner. Momma drops a saucepan lid that clatters loudly on the counter and Jamal drops his monster on the floor with a little "Uh-oh!" sound. Momma says, "Jamal, did I make you jump? Momma made a bang! Here's your monster," as she picks up the toy and hands it to him. As soon as she turns back to the stove, Jamal flings the monster onto the floor and loudly repeats, "Uh-oh!" Smiling, Momma turns and says, "Uh-oh...? OH! Uh-oh! Monster fell again!" She picks up the toy and returns it to Jamal with a smile. Can you see the need beneath the deed? Momma can. **Need met.**

For more than 30 minutes, **five-week-old Maria** has been passed from relative to relative, dandled on knees, jiggled and rocked, smiled at and cooed to. Her grandmother's big hands are now wrapped around her ribcage under her armpits and Nanna's strong index fingers support her tired neck, as the rest of her body dangles in the air. Nanna kisses her nose over and over, chirping, "Waddacutie!" between each kiss. Maria turns her head, averting her face from Nanna's, and closes her eyes. Nanna turns Maria's body to bring her face back into view and begins the kissing and chirping again. Maria turns her head firmly the other direction, as far as it will go, with a loud grunt. Someone's needs are being met, but whose? **Need not met.**

YOUR Trust in Action: You Are Not Stuck With What You Grew Up With

How can you know whether you own this **Infant SASS of Trust**? You cannot remember experiences like this from your earliest months of life. However, family history, your memories of later childhood, and

your observations now of those who parented you then can provide a good sense of how your needs were met in your first year of life. You can see echoes of your process learning to trust.

Are there family stories about how every time you cried, you were brought into your parents' bed? Are there stories of how you were a happy baby, always laughing or always "easy going?" These are clues that your needs were probably regularly met. Or are there stories of listening to you cry for long periods of time, or about how you were always hungry or demanding attention? Are there memories of how "willful" you were? A "bad tempered" or "fretful" baby? These are clues that your needs may not have been consistently met.

In later years, at times when you needed your adults' attention or support, or when you were in emotional distress, was your need for attention, support or comfort met? Were you turning to your adults at home for emotional needs when you were 8, 12, and 15? If not, that may well mean the early foundation was not well laid.

And as you notice how those who parented you respond to the needs of infants now, you may get additional clues about your early efforts at the **Infant Success Strategy of Trust**. If there are new babies in the family today, notice how your childhood adults are at meeting these infants' needs for care, support, and comfort. How well do they read their cues and signals? Are they focused on following the baby's leads, or are their responses more about their own needs and desires?

All these reflections and observations can provide you with greater awareness of how your very simple needs were met in infancy, to help you understand the strength and stability of the trust you gained way back then. Even though those experiences actually wired up a little neural network to guide your access to and application of this Success Strategy of Trust forever, Development Do-Overs can repattern your behavior and re-wire your brain.

Wholeness is possible and you still own the raw ore of the SASSy Trust you need, buried inside and still waiting for you. And I've got the tools to help you go after it now.

Get whole. Get success in your life. Get Self-Aware about Trust.

GET ALL YOUR SASS! You deserve it.

