Dear Editor,

The issue of healthy attachment, or secure attachment, in children was a subject recently brought up. Promoting healthy attachment among new parents is very important to growth of children. In this letter I will give some helpful tips on promoting and establishing healthy attachment.

Healthy attachment has been linked to four developmental phases. The first phase is the Preattachment Phase. This phase covers ages birth to 6weeks. Babies are born with attachment instincts. These instincts range from grasping, staring into caregiver’s eyes, smiling and crying. They recognize mom but are not attached yet. At this age we want to make sure we are returning that eye contact and talk warmly to the child. This establishes a comfort between the child and parent.

The second phase is the “Attachment in the making” Phase. The ages for this phase is 6 weeks to 6-8 months. At this age they are developing a sense of trust. They are learning the signals to use and response of caregiver when needing something. They are recognizing the difference in a stranger and a parent but is not upset when separated from caregiver. The child is learning signals, so when the child cries we want to make sure we respond warmly and try and sooth them. This starts the attachment process.

The third phase is the “Clear cut” phase. The ages for this phase is 6-18 months to 18 months – 2 years. At this phase the caregiver is definitely evident. Separation anxiety comes into the picture. When the caregiver leaves the room the child can become upset and protests the parent’s departure. Separation anxiety doesn’t always exist, it depends on the temperament of the child and the situation. Their caregiver is their secure base and will explore his environment only with the caregiver in the vicinity. We want to give comfort that the caregiver will return in this phase. Crying and wanting to follow is normal but will not happen in all children.

The fourth phase is Formation of a reciprocal relationship. The ages for this phase is 18 months to 2 years and beyond. At this age communication and speech is better. Understanding also plays a big role. Giving the child and explanation of the separation and return helps comfort the child. At his stage we can also negotiate to help persuade the behavior or goal we want to reach.

No two children are alike. So the outcome may be different and the phases may come at different ages. The child’s temperament also makes a difference. I hope this letter helps shed some light on the subject of healthy attachment in children.