



Love Is Layers of Sharing

LOVE UNIT

This unit is about relationships. Relationships are built on the shared feelings people have about one another. It is through sharing experiences and sharing feelings that people come to like or dislike one another. Relationships develop over time and with repeated shared experiences. Each time two people share the same experience, they build a layer of understanding about one another. With each sharing, they gain more understanding about what each one values. They are building patterns of interaction that will carry forward and grow stronger with each encounter. They are building relationships.

Friendship is a sharing relationship. As humans, we have a basic need to feel liked by other humans. We like to laugh with other people and to share fun. A positive experience is usually the start of a positive relationship. We also learn from one another. This gives us a feeling of safety to know we are like others; it is a feeling of belonging. These are the people we seek out more often. We are willing to share some of our feelings with them because we trust them. We call these people our friends.

A love relationship is something more. Beyond this need to be liked, we also have a need to feel even closer to a few special people. With these people, we share almost all of our feelings, both positive and negative. We know we are safe in doing so because we can trust them to respect, understand, and tolerate our uniqueness. But we must also give back this same respect and understanding. We must share and support our loved one's feelings with the same trust. This kind of relationship results in a deep and rewarding bond. It is a feeling of commitment and of belonging to one another. We call this *love*.

For adults, a real love relationship is built over time. It does not just happen. Both parties will explore values, discover trust, begin to appreciate each other's feelings, and learn to respect each other's space and limits. Love is sharing goals, sharing ideas, sharing projects. Love is making each shared experience fun for one another. Maintaining a strong love relationship takes effort.

For most babies the process is different. The first relationship they experience is a feeling of "oneness." Babies start with a sense of belonging, a feeling of love. They feel safe and protected, understood and cared for when their first relationship is nurturing and responsive. As they grow and develop, they will model the behavior of these few special people and learn to carry forward the values that will allow them to give love.

A first relationship for a baby sets the basis for all others. If it is a loving relationship, a baby will continue to experience other people with feelings of confidence, joy, and trust. In this way, she will learn how to build strong bonds of

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friendship and how to give love to others. From the first relationship she learns to share feelings. This is empathy — the structure for the development of conscience and values.

For many parents, relationship building does not come naturally. Their models have not been strong, and they have learned to expect shared negative emotions and experiences. For these parents, a new baby can mean a new start. Learning how to create the positive layers of sharing that will make a loving relationship with their baby can also help parents improve other personal relationships.