

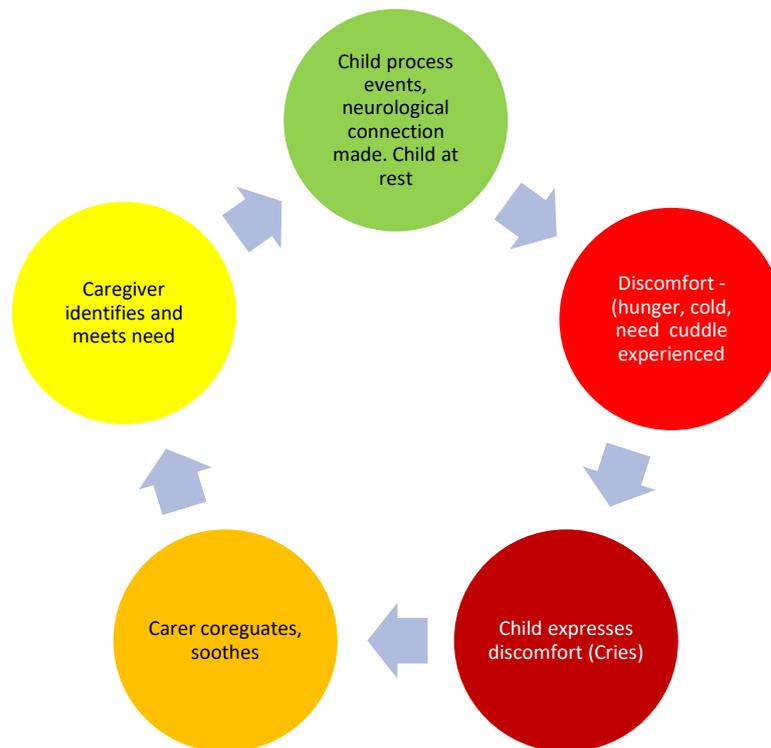


Hungry Heart?

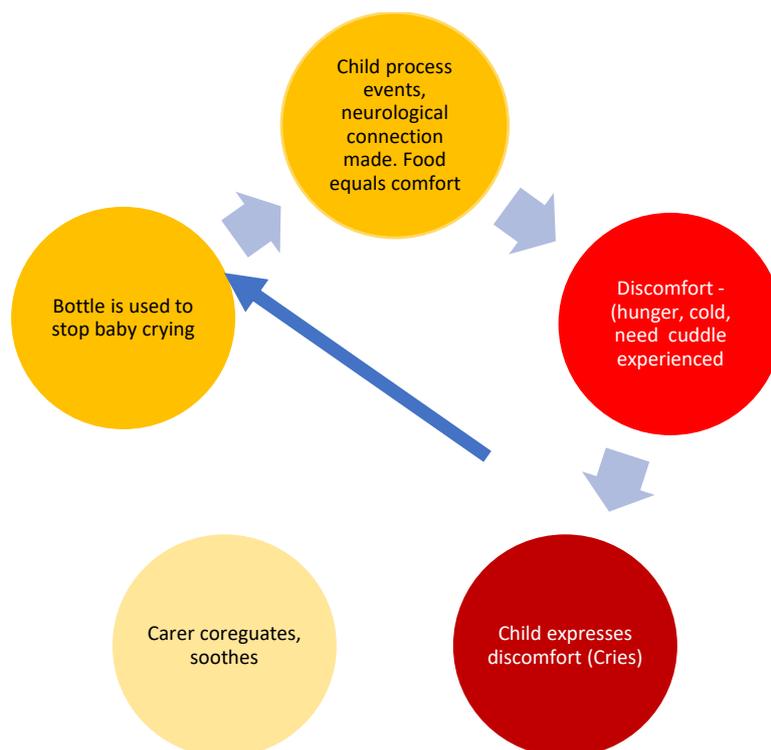
I have been thinking about all those children who always seem to be hungry, but actually take a bite or two, and then leave the rest. Understandably very irritating and perplexing for parents and carers!

Some children have huge issues around food because they were not fed and had to manage hunger pains. For these children, often a snack box which is available, in their room or at school, all the time, can be the answer – there needs to be a narrative to let the child know that you have “seen” their need – and therefore that you can “see” them, and their needs are important to you – such as “I have noticed that you get very worried if you do not know where to go for food, and sometimes you take it and hide it (*or other behaviour you have noticed*). I wonder if this is because you did not always get food when you needed it when you were little. That must have been so hard and scary. Probably you had a hurting tummy too. I do not want you to ever feel like that again, so here is a snack box, you can carry it with you or keep it in your room, and we can refill it every day.” Another way is to have an instantly accessible snack bowl, but sometimes children seem to need to keep these things secret. A snack box gives them control.

However I think there is a whole other issue that is sometimes going on, where the need (expressed as hunger) is for connection. If we look again at the basic **POSITIVE** attachment cycle:



In this cycle, the **FIRST** thing that happens is that the carer co-regulates; soothing the child and reducing arousal (distress) **BEFORE** trying to figure out the need which is being expressed. This is the basis of co-regulation, and soothes both carer and infant alike. In this small space of time, the connection between carer and infant and the basis of a secure base are established, as a result of the many many repetitions of this cycle of expression of need and appropriate response that happen every day. The infant feels calmer, and builds a picture of **ADULTS** as the agents of comfort, giving rise to trust, hope, love, security, confidence and safety. I believe that a whole different thing happens if the carer (especially in the very early days) instead of taking time to regulate the infant and work out exactly what is needed – (after all sometimes a cuddle, or a playful interaction is what is needed, or a host of other issues) – and instead goes straight to feeding, possibly not even feeding the infant themselves but propping the bottle up, then something else happens. Look again at the cycle:



Looking at the above, we can identify the possibility that by cutting out the interpersonal interaction that happens when we co-regulate and soothe, then maybe instead of the **ADULT** being the source of comfort, at the same time giving information about the internal states of the infant (“do you want your bottle?,are you cold? etc”) that **FOOD** becomes the default comforter. If this is the case, there will always be a feeling that food is what you need, but it will not ever really fulfil the need. So this could be answer to why, children may ask for food, then not really want it. So maybe it might be an idea to give a narrative again “Of course you can have a snack. But I wonder if you might be hungry for a cuddle as well? Come here and give me a big hug first!” If this seems to be successful then you can follow up with some more information: “I wonder if you did not get enough cuddles when you were a baby. Maybe you were given a bottle instead. Well, we have some cuddles to catch up on then. Lucky me!!!”

Give it a go, and good luck!!

NB: A note about giving a narrative: Sometimes carers find that the language suggested just does not fit for them. So just to remind you, that if this is the case it is best to change the words so that it comes from you – otherwise it will feel artificial for you and not ring true for the child. However

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the content needs to have the same elements of the fact that you can “see” something about your child, a bit of a curious or wondering element (where I might start with “maybe” or “I wonder” and end with a suggestion or fun comment.