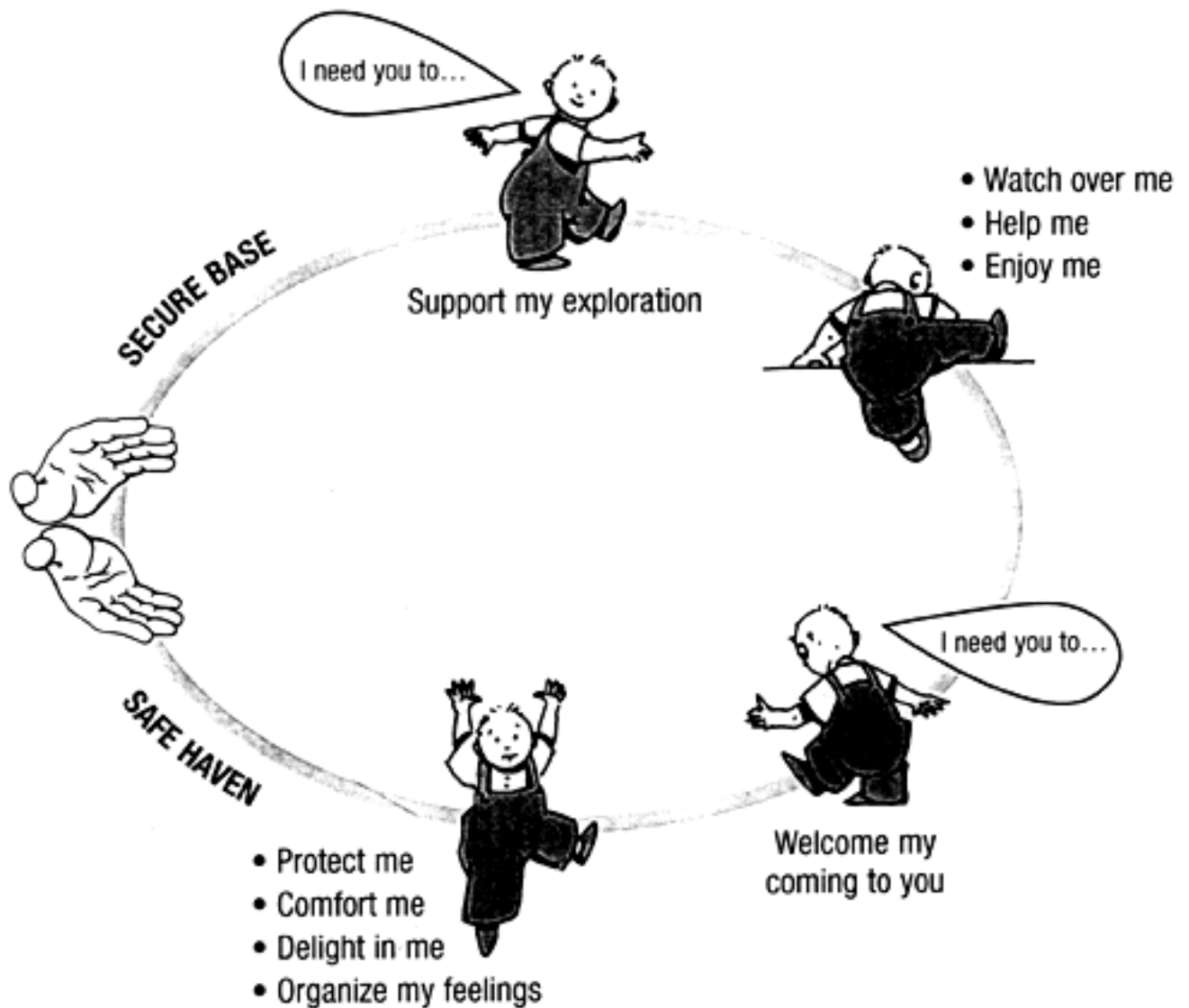


The Circle of Security

Parent Attending to the Child's Needs



Always: be **BIGGER, STRONGER, WISER, and KIND.**
Whenever possible: follow your child's need.
Whenever necessary: take charge.

The Circle of Security

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The Circle of Security was developed by Cooper, Hoffman, Marvin, & Powell (2000) to demonstrate the reciprocal process of attachment relationships. According to the diagram, children need attachment figures that are physically and emotionally available and provide a secure base. Providing a secure base means that the caregiver will not only support and encourage a child's need for exploration and maintain his feelings of security, but also watch over him, help him, and enjoy his activities. This support will increase the child's time spent in exploration.

Children also need caregivers to act as safe havens that children can return to for protection, comfort, and soothing and to simply welcome them back with delight when they return. Repeated experiences of being welcomed back help children continue to go out into the world and explore without feelings of stress and anxiety.

The diagram stresses the importance of the adult being bigger, stronger, and wiser. The caregiver should follow the child's needs whenever possible, but take charge whenever necessary. This comment reminds us that the relationship is not equal. The caregiver has the important job of providing a structure for the child's environment with choices and limits. Once children become mobile, setting limits can be more challenging than when they were infants. Choices given during infancy are the beginning of supporting a child's development of self.

Posing questions and offering positive feedback helps caregivers reflect on their role of being a secure base and safe haven for children:

- Tell me about a time when your child used you as a secure base and moved away from you to explore his world. How did this feel to you?
- The way he looked back to you with those wide eyes and worried look on his face was his cue that he needed you. It was great the way you quickly responded by saying his name in a soothing tone, moving towards him, and then picking him up. He really sees you as his safe haven.
- What choices do you give to children in your care? What are some limits you use? How does it feel to have to enforce limits with children?