



# Creating

*“Bye-Bye Baby Bunting.  
Daddy’s gone a hunting.  
To catch a little rabbit skin,  
to wrap his Baby Bunting in.”*

**M**y aunt sang this to me as she rocked me in the rocking chair. My aunt felt so different from my mother. I didn’t have to struggle to get away or dissociate into a floppy, non-moving, barely breathing, pretending-to-be-dead little girl. I allowed my aunt, who exuded safeness, to calm and sooth me, so I could drop off to sleep.

My sister and I hadn’t been safe with my mentally ill mother. Thank God our aunt and uncle were there to take us in.

My aunt had her arms wrapped around me, so I could feel myself. She had her face close to mine, so I could see myself in her eyes. It felt good, and I could lie still a little longer. The more my aunt sang and rocked, the more her song, voice, smell and the rhythm of her rocking chair calmed me.

My active and receptive language was developing. Words mattered. I was reminded, through the words of her song and by her comforting touch, that there was someone out there much bigger and stronger than myself who had my best interests at heart. I was Baby Bunting. A new template of safety-security-trust in a power bigger than myself was being created. The safety and security I felt in the arms of my aunt helped pave the way for a later strong belief in a loving, abstract, heavenly higher power. First, we learn to trust what we can see, touch, taste, hear and experience — then we can transfer that trust to the great unseen.

Reversing a disruption in the internalization of safety-security-trust isn’t impossible; it’s just hard. It takes time, patience and the ability to look beyond the behaviors for the source of the

# Safety, Security & Trust through Specialized Parent-Child Activities

By Beth Powell, LCSW

“emotional commotion.” And basic fear for personal safety because of past unsafe experiences is too frequently the source.

Below are three activities I’ve taught parents in my practice that they can do with their children to help promote healthy attachment, trust and internalized safety/security. The first two are memories from my childhood. They are presented in a type of socio-emotional sequential order. A child has to first be regulated by an adult so that they can learn to trust.

## 1. Rocking Chair Time to Help Instill

**Self-Regulation:** I am amazed how many homes no longer have rocking chairs. Every home should have at least one and it should be used to down-regulate children, comfort them, and be a vehicle for quality “love” time between parent and child. Parents can even rock themselves when they feel out of sorts. Rocking helps soothe and calm the brain, establishes a rhythm that the cerebellum needs and it just feels good. Even bigger kids can be rocked; it’s not just for those younger than 4. A comforting song can be added, perhaps something spiritually soothing, or a drawn out “shush” sound can be vocalized between long, deep breaths. This activity could be regulating for anyone within hearing distance.

## 2. Knee-Bouncing Time to Help Instill Trust and Pleasure through

**Relationship:** One of my absolute favorite close times with the adults who loved and enjoyed me as a child was to “Go see Mr. Brown.” I have no idea where this knee-bouncing game originated, but I have a feeling that it emerged somewhere from the 19th Century piney woods of Mississippi with the not-so-literate folk and was passed down generationally through my mother’s family. To perform this adult-led activity, the child sits, facing toward the adult, on the adult’s knees. It’s important that the adult’s face and body language convey confidence and fun. First, the adult invites the

child to climb up on their knees with a “C’mon. Let’s go see Mr. Brown.” With the child securely held, the adult starts bouncing the child to an even, consistent 60-beat a minute rhythm, with a lot of eye contact and facial expression. Then, the adult rhythmically chants the following in synchrony with the knee bouncing:

Mr. Brown went to town  
Riding a goat, leading a hound.  
The hound barked; the goat jumped.

Threw Mr. Brown right down on a stump!  
Surprise! The child is NOT tossed to the floor. Instead, the child is gently, slowly and securely lowered backward, their head supported by the adult’s hands as far back as the child can comfortably tolerate without showing signs of anxiety and fear. Then slowly the child is brought back up to a sitting position on the adult’s knees. As the child grows in trust that the adult performing the activity can and will keep them from falling, then the speed at which the child is lowered can be gradually increased. When the child is back up in a sitting position, the child is asked, “Who pulled you up off that stump?” “You did!” is the desired answer. “And I’ll do it every time!” Is the adult response.

## 3. Psycho-Dramatic Play to Help Instill Safety-Security-Trust During Sleep

**Time.** Sleep time can be a frightening time for so many children. Sometimes, it’s hard for kids who have had too many scary night time experiences to fall asleep and stay in that state. These kids need to be reminded, through play, that the adult caregiver is there to keep them safe when they are not awake. Here is a play activity to be repeated to help erase past unsavory sleep time experiences with new ones that remind them that the caregiver is ever watching over them while they rest.

This game is best played, at first, during the day. The child (or children) should get their bed things out and pretend to be asleep on the floor. The parent sits in a chair at the door where the children can see them, turns the

lights out (but for a nightlight, of course), folds their arms and acts as a guard. The adult confidently scans the horizon for danger, while also visually scanning the children as they sleep. Then the parent exclaims, “It’s so wonderful that the children are safe and getting a good night’s sleep.” Sometimes children really do fall asleep. Sometimes they fake-snore, or pretend to awaken and cry, to see if the parent will come to the rescue. Of course, the parent does and then returns to the door to sit guard. Sometimes a child will proclaim that a monster, bad guy or a whatever is either in the room or trying to get into the room. With karate chops and kung fu kicks, the parent defends the children and chases the imaginary intruder out the door to the frequent delightful requests of “Do it again; do it again.” What children practice in play with the adults who care for them becomes their new brain template for the future.

Seems like somewhere back in my memory, there is a familiar image of my aunt wielding a fly swatter and chasing all the “boogers” away as she spanked them on their behinds for frightening me as I tried to sleep. And because those “boogers” didn’t want to mess with my aunt, they never came back...

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