

The make up of families in modern day western cultures is very diverse. Flynn and Rai (2003, p.8) state that 'one in four children live in a lone parent household and one in ten live in a step-family. This shows how families have changed and that a family does not just mean a mother, father and children. With the introduction of sperm donors children can also be born to same sex families. Flynn and Rai (2003, p.38) describe a baby called Tembi, born to two lesbian parents by sperm donor. Being born into a family like this does not cause an unsettled life for a baby. Flynn and Rai (2003, p.40) state that 'the consistency and quality of the emotional relationship is more important than the biological one' suggesting that as long as a baby receives care in a settled and constant way the sexes of the parents are irrelevant. Flynn and Rai (2003, p.49) also state that 'people other than child's biological parents can provide good quality attachments'

Families expectations, experiences, culture and family structure can have great influence on babies. Flynn and Rai (2003, p.24) describe how families expectations can differ and also how babies respond to other people.

Different behaviour is sometimes encouraged or discouraged in families according to gender. Flynn and Rai (2003, p.39) state 'for example "tiny" and "peaceful" are often used to describe girls whereas a boy might be described as "robust" or "protesting loudly" as angry or noisy behaviour is generally not encouraged in girls'. Flynn and Rai (2003, p.37) show some families may have high expectations and assumptions about their children's future. Some families have strong cultural values. In the *Understanding Children* (2003) video, Hati is a child brought up in the in a family with strong traditions and routines. Some parents assume that their babies will just fit in to their lifestyles, Flynn and Rai (2003, p.39) state that 'they will have to balance and properly adapt these expectations with the reality of living together. Although babies are born with certain characteristics like eye colour, the environment they are brought up with and the influence their parents and close others around them can shape their future. Flynn and Rai (2003, p.35) show that this is called Nature and Nurture.

Babies have the ability to communicate both verbally and physically from an early age, adults and older children play a key role in promoting babies development.

The *Understanding Children* video band 1 shows mothers interacting with their babies and the babies communicating back. Families are usually very close to babies and have a huge impact on their development. Sometimes families do not realise they are helping their children's development. Flynn and Rai (2003, p.27) describe that by attentive behaviour and exaggerated use of syllables and vowels, parents introduce language skills.

Families are important but the consistency and quality of close relationships is equally important. In the *Understanding Children* (2003) video Charlotte's life is described. Charlotte's parents separated very early in her life and the care she has received is shown as inconsistent, disrupted by stress the family had. They

have moved many times and Charlotte's mother appears as detached, speaking negatively. Flynn and Rai (2003, p.42) states that 'peoples lack of readiness to become parents and stressful circumstances surrounding their

lives can influence the relationships they have with their children'. In the *Understanding Children* (2003) video it is shown is that this situation can be changed. Charlotte and her mother with help from a play therapist slowly improve Charlotte's behaviour and Charlotte's relationship with her mother. Families have the ability to counteract bad experiences through close attention and love. The *Understanding children* (2003) video band 3 shows Jamie's experiences. Being not planned, his mother suffered depression after his birth, struggling when Jamie was very young. Unable to bond with her son Jamie has formed a strong bond with his father. The family adapted and turned around a bad start. Flynn and Rai (2003, p.43) quote from Daniel, Wassel and Gilligan (1999,p.38) 'it should never be considered too late for any child to be offered the opportunity to experience a good relationship with an adult who considers them to be special.'

Bibliography

Flynn, R and Rai, L. (2003) *Understanding Children*, Milton Keynes: The Open University

Understanding Children (2003) video cassette, The Open University