

**THE FIRST FUNDAMENTAL VALUE:
*THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING***

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We all need to be taken seriously by the people who take care of us first, at birth. As infants, we need to have our mother, father, and others who take care of us communicate that they value our simply being alive. We need to receive that caring through all our senses.

As infants, we need to be responded to when we cry, to have our physiological needs met, and to be valued for our existence. An infant is almost helpless, except for the ability to cry and make generalized movements. These sounds and movements are initially the means an infant has to “ask” for what he or she needs from others.

An infant must be taken care of in order to live. In addition to food, shelter, and warmth, an infant needs to be held lovingly and stimulated by that human contact in order to survive. Thus, an infant is in a precarious position: if others upon whom he or she depends do not respond (either because they cannot or because they refuse), the child will die.

In order to survive, anyone (including a pre-verbal infant) will sacrifice a great deal, even tolerate self-negation in order to live. For example, if the infant’s cries for attention go unanswered, he or she will eventually stop crying even when hungry or wet.

This process of gradually “giving up” on getting needs met by crying may be a type of “learning,” a type of conditioned response, described by some researchers as “state conditioned learning.” Whatever the mechanics of the process, the infant establishes a lasting pattern that can be described as the negation of his or her “right” to exist, to be, and to be nurtured. This negation usually leads to serious psychological symptoms.

When the infant receives the needed care, he or she develops a lasting sense of the value of his or her existence.

Adults who use words and concepts an infant does not yet have might say the infant learns: “I’m important because I am here. I have the right to be in this world and to be responded to.”

The following conceptualization describes the process by which a child establishes his or her “picture” of three sets of data:

- 1) a self-image,
- 2) an image of others, and
- 3) an image of how to get needs met from and relate to others.

If put in adult concepts:

“I need you to take care of me, mom, and
I’m glad you like me the way (gender) I am;
I’ll be myself, and you’ll be happy, and
I’ll get what I need to survive and
be happy just by asking for it;
I’m important because I’m here.

- 1) The self-image implied above is “I’m important and I deserve to live and be taken seriously.”
- 2) The image of others is “You are nurturing and will attend to me and give me enough of what I need.”
- 3) The image of how to get needs met is “I’ll ask for what I need and want and I’ll get enough.”