

Attachment

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Attachment

The aim of the presentation:

- To introduce some of the basic concepts of attachment.
- To raise awareness of the link between children's behavior and relationship to caregiver.

This presentation is based on the theory and work done by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth



Attachment

Attachment describes the dynamics of long-term relationship between humans.

Its most important principle is that an infant needs to develop a relationship with at least one primary caregiver for social and emotional development to occur normally.



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Attachment theory explains how much the parents relationship with the child influences development.

This relationship can be disturbed if the parent is unable to fulfill this due to mental illness or substance misuse



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Attachments are unique, lasting emotional ties between infant and parent.

All infants will develop attachments to their parents, even if the she/he is harsh or abusive.

The only exception to this rule is children reared without parents or specific primary caregivers (such as children in some orphanages).



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Thus, rather than describing a child as being attached or not, attachment theory and research focus on *the quality of the relationship* between the child and parent.

An attachment usually takes the first year of life to develop, through repeated interactions between the child and parent.



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Attachment "Quality"

There are two basic patterns of attachment:

- secure
- insecure

The key factor in promoting a secure attachment is parenting behavior.



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Many research studies have shown that

- Sensitive, responsive parenting promotes secure attachment.
- Insensitive, rejecting, or inconsistent parenting has been linked to insecure attachment.





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Attachment styles

A theory developed by Mary Ainsworth based on of a number of attachment patterns in infants: secure attachment, avoidant attachment and anxious attachment. A fourth pattern, disorganized attachment, was identified later by Mary Main.

- The **Strange situation** is a procedure devised by Mary Ainsworth in the 1970s to observe attachment relationships between a caregiver and child.

SECURE:

A child who is securely attached, will explore freely while the parent is present and will engage with strangers. The child will be visibly upset when the parent departs and happy to see the she/he return. However, the child will not engage with a stranger if their parent is not in the room.

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A secure attachment is characterized by the child's ability to use his or her parent as a source of comfort and a "secure base" from which to explore.

A key principle of attachment theory is that dependence leads to independence.

In other words, it is only when a child feels confident in his parent's availability that he can fully explore and play on his own.



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This video illustrate secure attachment by using The strange situation

[Click here to view the video](#)



Attachment

An insecure attachment is characterized by the child's inability to use his or her parent for comfort or as a secure base. Here are 2 examples:

[Click here to view the video](#)

[Click here to view the video](#)

There are three basic types of insecure attachment.



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ANXIOUS/INSECURE:

A child with the anxious-avoidant insecure attachment style will avoid or ignore the parent- showing little emotion when the he/she departs or returns. The child may run away from the parent when he/she approaches and fail to cling to her/him when picked up.

Some children are overly dependent, expressing difficulty with separation and with independent play.



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AVOIDANT:

A child with an avoidant attachment style is anxious of exploration and of strangers, even when the parent is present. When the parent departs, the child is extremely distressed. The child will be ambivalent when he/she returns.



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Some children are under-dependent, seeming disengaged from the parent and barely noticing them upon separation. Such “independence” in an infant or toddler, although sometimes praised, is usually developmentally inappropriate.



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DISORGANIZED:

A child may cry during separation but avoid the parent when he/she returns or may approach, then freeze or fall to the floor. Some show stereotyped behavior, rocking to and fro or repeatedly hitting themselves.

Disorganized/disoriented attachment also refers to children who seem frightened or disorganized in the presence of their parents.



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Parental behaviors typically associated with insecure attachment include:

- Interfering with the child's attempts at exploration (i.e., intrusive, overly controlling)
- Unclear, inconsistent, developmentally inappropriate expectations and supervision
- Ignoring the child's needs and cues
- Inconsistent, unreliable responsiveness



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- Hostile, threatening, and frightening behaviors
- Prioritizing the parent's needs over the child's (i.e., self-absorbed)
- Behaving like a child or treating the child as though he/she is in charge (i.e., role-reversal)
- Marked withdrawal, fright, hesitation or timidity around the child
- Sexualized or overly intimate behaviors



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Attachment styles	% of sample (also generalized to represent U.S. population)	The child's general state of being	Mother's responsiveness to her child's signals and needs	Fulfillment of the child's needs (why the child acts the way it does)
Secure Attachment	65%	Secure, explorative, happy	Quick, sensitive, consistent	Believes and trusts that his/her needs will be met
Avoidant Attachment	20%	Not very explorative, emotionally distant	Distant, disengaged	Subconsciously believes that his/her needs probably won't be met
Ambivalent Attachment	10-15%	Anxious, insecure, angry	Inconsistent; sometimes sensitive, sometimes neglectful	Cannot rely on his/her needs being met
Disorganized Attachment	10-15%	Depressed, angry, completely passive, nonresponsive	Extreme, erratic: Frightened or frightening, passive or intrusive	Severely confused with no strategy to have his/her needs met



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Early attachments lay the foundation for social and academic skills.

A number of studies that have followed children from infancy to adolescence or adulthood, have illustrated that *attachment quality* is one of the strongest predictors of later development.



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Secure attachment forecasts healthy social, emotional, cognitive, and motivational development.

For example, a child who had a secure attachment with her parent as an infant is more likely in childhood to be:



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- independent and self confident,
- to have appropriate interactions with peers and teachers,
- to manage her emotions,
- to be focused, curious and motivated in school,
- to have strong problem solving skills.

Secure attachment is the best gift a parent can give to a child



Attachment

Insecure attachment forecasts developmental and adjustment problems.

For example, a child who was insecurely attached in infancy is more likely in childhood to :





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- have poor social skills (e.g., withdrawal or aggression),
- act out and be disobedient,
- have poor communication skills,
- be impulsive and easily distracted,
- lack curiosity and motivation in school.

[Click here to view the video](#)



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It is important to note that

An insecure attachment *does not* fate a child to failure.

Change certainly can occur.

The longer a child is on a specific path, however, the harder it is to alter the course.





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Attachment, behaviour and learning

There is a population of pupils in schools who seem unable to:

- access learning,
- engage and achieve, and
- to move on into adulthood with confidence;



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Diminished self-esteem and resilience , limits engagement in relationships and emotional and cognitive development.



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The reasons for this are varied and complex and their difficulties can be compounded by the responses they elicit in others.

How they bother others matters, and in general it is the conduct-disordered boy who bothers us most.

The quiet and vulnerable children are often overlooked.



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It is the teacher who encounters the factors behind the disappointing outcomes daily.

Behind every child who misbehaves and underperforms in school there is a story, and the story is acted out in the classroom.

For some it is a temporary glitch in their lives from which they quickly recover; others need support and intervention.



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But in the most complex and challenging situations, it can be a long history of intergenerational adversity which the child trails into school and presents to the staff in alarming ways.

Attachment theory helps us understand the implications of early experience in relation to later life outcomes, including learning.



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Extensive follow-up studies of the samples of cases observed - and studied in the early attachment research, *clearly indicated that secure attachment is the factor linked to children's more successful engagement in school.*

This in terms of

- social competence
- curiosity
- effective play and investigation
- sympathy towards others



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The contribution that an understanding of attachment theory can make to schools and learning outcomes is considerable.

The more vulnerable pupils can begin to re-experience more positive and hopeful relationships, greater emotional wellbeing and begin to engage more successfully in learning



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The insecure attachment behaviour can be understood as a social script based on learned patterns.

When this behaviour is acted out, the child needs us to understand what is going on.

To understand also means to endure.



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Questions for discussion:

- *Think about a situation where a child/adolescent has behaved in a way that annoyed or worried you and describe it to the group.*
- *How did you understand the behaviour?*
- *What do you think the she/he tried to communicate?*
- *Discuss a useful way of approaching the behaviour?*



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To learn more:

- Bowlby, John, A secure base : clinical applications of attachment theory, London : Routledge, 1988.
- Ainsworth, M.D., Blehar, M, Waters, E, & Wall, S. (1978) Patterns of Attachment: A Psychological Study of the Strange Situation, Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum



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- Crittenden, Patricia (2008). Raising Parents. Attachment, parenting and child safety. Willian Publishing.

