

Childhood Attachment



Fetal

Newborn

Birth-6
weeks

According to Florida Tech, the attachments that babies and younger children form are critical indicators for later development. Forming attachments as a baby or young child is key for survival, whether that attachment is positive or not (2018).

18 months
+

7 months-
18 months

6 weeks-7
months



What is Attachment?

John Bowlby in 1969 described attachment as a “unique relationship between an infant and their caregiver that is the foundation for further health development” (Flaherty, 2011).

Mary Ainsworth in 1963 described attachment as a “secure base from which to explore” (Flaherty, 2011).

There are two main types of attachment, these are secure attachment and insecure attachment.

For your child to have a secure attachment, they need to:

- “feel safe”

- “feel seen and known”

- “feel comfort, soothing and reassurance”

- “feel valued”

- And “feel supported to explore” (Sacks, P, 2020).



What are the different stages of attachments?

Peggy Emerson and Rudolph Schaffer in 1964 conducting a study that looked over 60 babies under the age of 18 months. All mothers of the children involved kept a diary of the behaviour of their children during the study. These were categorised into three different areas; “stranger anxiety, separation anxiety, and social referencing” (McLeod, 2022). Further research concluded that children showing signs of social referencing had already formed a ‘secure attachment’.

According to Bowlby, as stated by Li, 2023, attachment is developed in four stages. These are; the “Pre-Attachment Phase 0-2 months”, “Attachment-in-the-making Phase 2-6 months”, “Clear-cut Attachment Phase 6 months-2 years”, and “Goal-corrected Partnership Phase 3-year old – Adolescence” (Pamela Li, 2023).

The Stages of Development

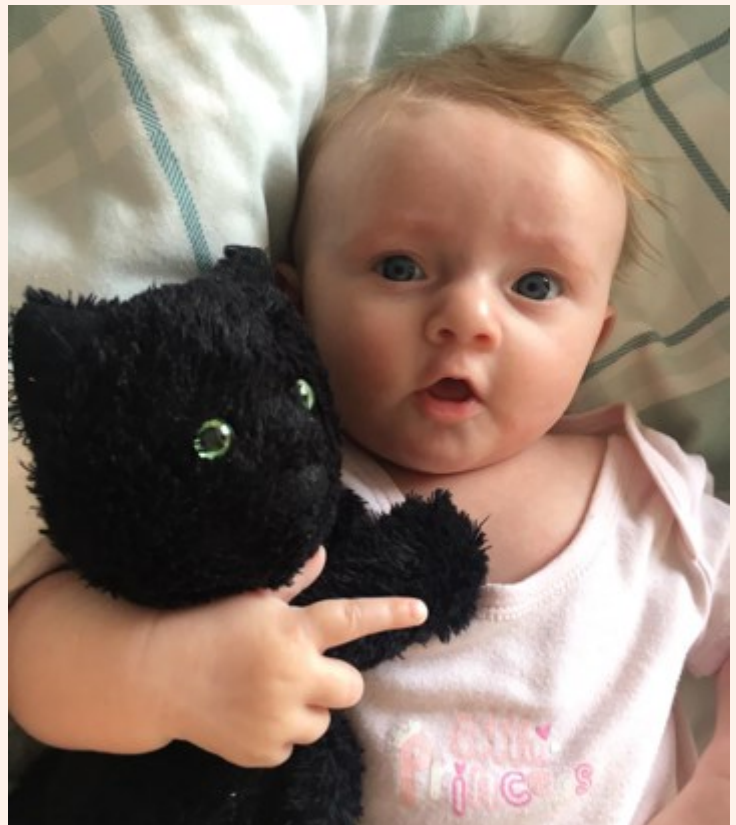
Pre-Attachment Phase 0-2 months

Pamela Li states that infants show a level of social interest to any person at this time meaning the infant is under no distress when being passed from one caregiver to another (Pamela Li, 2023).



Attachment-in-the-making Phase 2-6 months

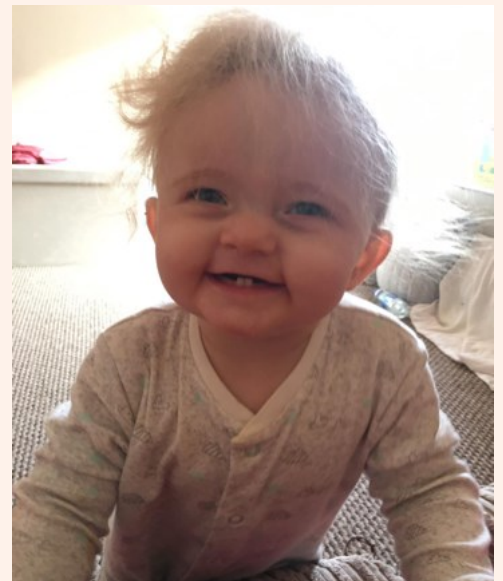
Pamela Li states that infants start to show a level of favouritism or preferences in this phase. This is also when 'stranger anxiety' starts to play a role in the infants life. The infant in this phase also forms a primary attachment and a secondary attachment, the primary attachment being the infants "safe haven" (Pamela Li, 2023).





Clear-Cut Attachment Phase –6 months-2 years

Pamela Li states that infants and children within this stage will tend to cling to their primary caregiver more. Prolonged separation at this age between the child and primary caregiver could cause trauma for the child that could potentially arise within adulthood (Pamela Li, 2023).



Goal-corrected Partnership Phase 3-years old—Adolescence

Pamela Li states that at this age although there is a secure attachment between a child and a primary caregiver, the child can navigate not being around their primary caregiver. Children at this age also start to realise that they are their own person and so is their primary caregiver. Within adolescence, although there is still an attachment to the primary caregiver, friends and individual relationships become more important (Pamela Li, 2023).



Mary Ainsworth's contribution to attachment theory

Mary Ainsworth was a developmental psychologist who became well known for her 'Strange Situation Assessment' in relation to attachment theory. According to Ainsworth through Kendra Cherry, the Strange Situation Assessment concluded that the way a child behaves and reacts when a primary caregiver leaves and returns to a child "can reveal important information about attachment" (Cherry, K, 2022).

Ainsworth through Cherry states that there are three main types of attachment styles:

- Secure Attachment
- Anxious/avoidant Attachment
- Anxious/resistant Attachment

John Bowlby's contribution to attachment theory

According to Learning Theories John Bowlby was a child psychiatrist and psychoanalyst who became well known for his theory on attachment. Bowlby's theory of attachment concluded that an infant has a built-in need for an emotional bond with their mother and by having this bond "increases chances of survival" (Learning Theories, 2016).

Bowlby states that there are four main types of attachment styles:

- Secure Attachment
- Anxious avoidant insecure Attachment
- Anxious resistant insecure (ambivalent) Attachment
- Disorganised/disorientated Attachment (Learning Theories, 2016).

Other researchers contributions to attachment

According to Bretherton and Munholland through Cassidy, Jones and Shaver, mentally healthy beings develop a "secure base script" (Cassidy, Jones, & Shaver, 2013) which manages healthily how a child reacts to events or stimuli. This allows from adolescence to adulthood a foundation where a child can successfully use another child as a "secure base" (Cassidy, Jones, & Shaver, 2013).

Importance of play

According to Sarah Bren from PlayLearnThrive, a healthy attachment or secure attachment is key to successful independent child led play. Secure attachment thrives when a child feels safe. Children who play independently grow up to become "more curious and confident children" (Bren 2021) which they take into adulthood. Play for children is not only fun, but also "provides cognitive and learning benefits" (Bren, 2021), too (Bren, 2021).

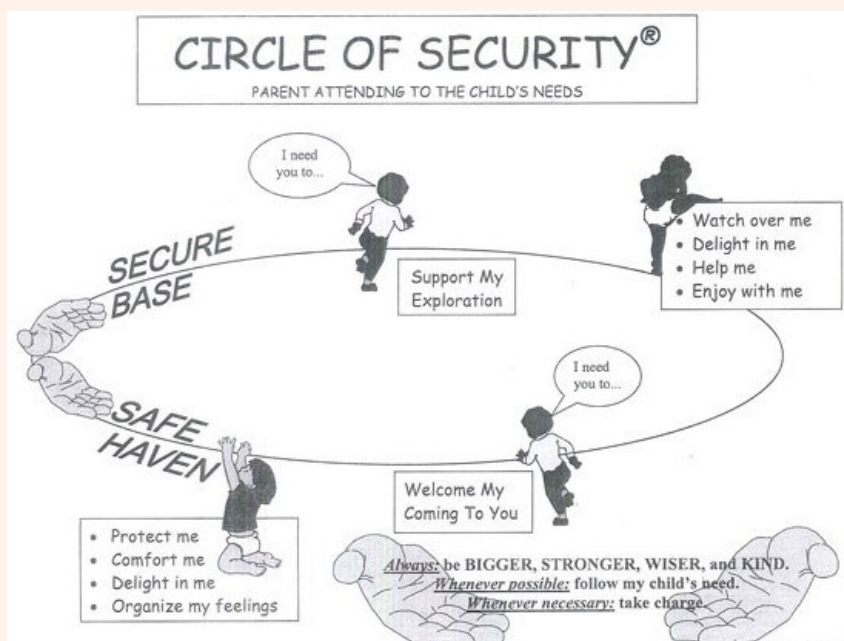
Secure Attachment

What is secure attachment?

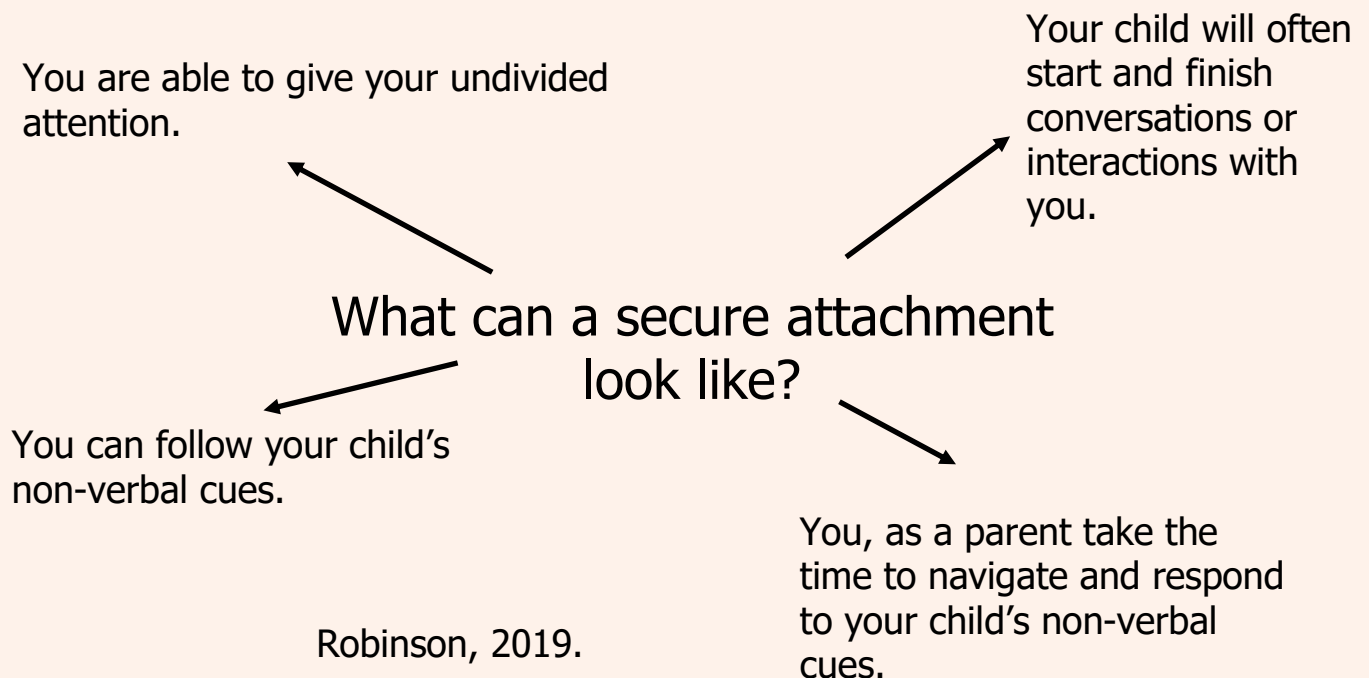
Secure attachment is widely defined as "children who have their emotional and physical needs met, acknowledged, and responded to" (Gillette, 2022).

According to PsychCentral, Dr. Dan Siegel developed four core support concepts known as 'the 4 S's'. These are:

- Safe
- Seen
- Soothed
- Secure (Gillette, 2022).



You do not have to be a perfect parent for your child to develop a secure attachment. Your child can feel “understood and secure at any age” (Robinsons, 2019).



Avoidant attachment

What is avoidant attachment?

"Avoidant attachment can develop if a child's parent or caregiver are emotionally unavailable or unresponsive over time. It can cause the child to stop seeking connections or expressing emotions" (Pelly, J. 2017).

In a study, it was observed that infants with signs or symptoms of having avoidant attachment appeared calm when their primary caregiver left, but unsettled, and in most cases "avoided or resisted having contact" (Pelly, J. 2017) with their primary caregiver upon re-arrival.



Altering from an insecure attachment style to a secure attachment style

If your child is exhibiting signs of having an insecure attachment, do not worry! It is still possible to change that so your child can have a secure attachment.

Changing a child's attachment style can happen "naturally" (Monjito, S. 2021). A child with an insecure attachment style socialising with another child who demonstrates signs of having a secure attachment "can help the child become more secure" (Monjito, S. 2021) in themselves as a result.

Secure attachment and emotional memory in childhood

A study by Belsky, Crnic, and Spritz (1996) observed that three year old children who had a secure attachment were more likely to remember the positive emotional events that they had seen or participated in, whereas, three year old children who had an insecure attachment were more likely to focus and remember the negative emotional events that they had seen or participated in. (Slater & Bremner, 2003/2007, pp. 154–167).

Secure attachment and emotional attention in childhood

Children who exhibit an insecure attachment style are not phased whether they are receiving positive or negative attention, they are just happy to be receiving attention. However, a child exhibiting a secure attachment style does not demonstrate the same cognitive process as this child is more self efficient. (Peake, A. N.D).



We think that it is vital to note as a parent, guardian, or caregiver, that there is nothing wrong with seeking help for yourself and for your child – in fact, we encourage it! A happy and healthy baby starts with you. Parenting, especially in the first few years are a really lonely and daunting time for any parent, so we have compiled a list of additional resources and websites for you to read to help you navigate yourself and your child through this time.

Please also know that your GP or Health Visitor are happy to assist you with any questions or concerns that you may have.

Additional resources for you and your child

Educational Psychology and speciality support

<https://www.norfolkepss.org.uk/supporting-children-with-attachment-difficulties-information-for-parentscarers/>

This bit of reading can help you to understand what is going on with your baby and how to change their attachment style from insecure to secure.

VeryWell Family

<https://www.verywellfamily.com/how-to-help-an-anxiously-attached-child-4780026>

This bit of reading can help you to determine which specific type of insecure attachment your child may have and then how to change your dynamic and approach.

Positive Psychology

<https://positivepsychology.com/attachment-styles-childhood/>

This is some general information on the different attachment styles.

NHS

<https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/supporting-others/childrens-mental-health/>

Tips and advice for parents and carers on how to support children and young people's mental wellbeing and give them the best chance to stay healthy.

Building a Happy Baby

https://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2018/04/happybaby_leaflet_web.pdf

PATH UK

<https://path-perinatal.eu/uk/families/>

A resource hub for parents, co-parents and intended parents who are planning a pregnancy, preparing for a baby, or adapting to life with a new-born and are seeking support and advice around emotional wellbeing.

PANDAS

<https://pandasfoundation.org.uk/>

PANDAS foundation is a community offering peer-to-peer support to families via a free helpline/text/email in addition to social media group support and supports perinatal mental health and well-being.

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