



Applying Attachment Theory in an Early Years Setting

(LCHS4010: Psychology in Health and Social Care)

Lecturer Name :FARAH WIITA

Name: OMOLOLA SONOLA

Student ID: 2423672

Date: 17/11/2025

AI Use Declaration

I confirm that I have fully complied with the assessment rules for this presentation concerning the use of AI tools. Grammarly was used exclusively for proofreading purposes (grammar and spelling checks). No generative AI tools were used in any part of the research, writing, ideation, or structuring of this presentation.

Introduction to Amira's Scenario



The Scenario

- Amira is 3 years old and has recently joined our nursery.
- She shows signs of anxiety when left by her carers.
- She has limited verbal communication.
- She has difficulty engaging in group play.

Our Role

As her practitioner, we must understand her developmental needs and create a support plan to promote her emotional, social, and cognitive well-being (World Health Organization, 2022)

Our Framework: Bowlby's Attachment Theory



What is Attachment Theory?

Attachment Theory is a psychological framework developed by John Bowlby. It suggests that infants are biologically programmed to form strong, lasting emotional bonds with their primary caregivers. This bond acts as a secure base for exploration and is essential for lifelong social and emotional development (Bowlby, 2008).

Key Concepts:

- Secure Base: The caregiver provides a safe haven from which the child can explore the world (Bowlby, 2008).
- Internal Working Models: Mental blueprints of self-worth and others' reliability, formed from early experiences (Brodie, 2024).
- Separation Anxiety: Distress upon separation from the primary caregiver; a natural response.

Explaining Amira's Behavior Through an Attachment Lens

Amira's Behavior → Attachment-Based Explanation

Anxiety when left



This is a clear sign of separation distress. Her internal working model may not assure her that her carers will return (Ainsworth et al., 2015)

Limited communication & social difficulty



Without a felt sense of security (a secure base), a child is less likely to explore their social environment, including communication with adults and play with peers (Bergin and Bergin, 2009).

Practical Strategies: Building a Secure Base

Our Goal: To become Amira's secure base in the nursery.

Strategy 1: The Key Person Approach

To provide Amira with a consistent emotional anchor, we will implement the statutory Key Person approach (Department for Education, 2024). This requires a designated practitioner to establish a trusting relationship with her, serving as her 'secure base' in the nursery. From this stable foundation, she will be able to explore and navigate this new and potentially intimidating environment safely.

Strategy 2: Sensitive & Predictable Caregiving

Our team will intentionally create a 'holding environment' characterized by emotional warmth and consistent routines. Every responsive interaction, whether it's during nappy changes or mealtimes, serves as an opportunity to establish a reliable history with Amira. This approach directly addresses her anxiety and demonstrates that she is in a safe and caring space (Nutbrown, Clough, and Atherton, 2013).



Practical Strategies: Supporting Social Exploration

to support Amira's exploration from her new secure base.

Strategy 3: Supported Socialization

- Start with parallel play alongside a calm peer, facilitated by the key person.
- Gradually introduce small, structured group activities with the key person present to provide emotional support (Bergin and Bergin, 2009).

Strategy 4: Emotional Coaching

- Help Amira name her emotions (e.g., "I can see you're feeling worried"). This validates her feelings and builds emotional literacy, a key aspect of mental well-being (World Health Organization, 2022).



Critical Evaluation of the Attachment Theory



Strengths: Foundational and Actionable | **Limitations: Context and Complexity**

- **Explanatory Power:** The theory offers significant explanatory insight by serving as an essential framework for understanding behaviors such as Amira's anxiety and withdrawal. It frames these behaviors as adaptive strategies that stem from underlying emotional needs (Bowlby, 2008).
- **Directly Informs Practice:** The theory directly informs practice through its application in evidence-based interventions. Its primary strength lies in its foundation of the Key Person approach, which makes the theoretical concepts actionable in everyday care (Department for Education, 2024).
- **Deterministic Undertones:** The theory has been criticized for its potential determinism, as it may place too much emphasis on the "critical period" of early childhood while underestimating the potential for resilience and positive change through later supportive relationships (Brodie, 2024).
- **Historical and Cultural Narrowness:** Initially, the theory focused exclusively on the mother-child relationship, neglecting the important roles of fathers, siblings, and other caregivers in a child's attachment network (Nutbrown, Clough, and Atherton, 2013). Additionally, its applicability across different cultures is disputed. The concepts of "sensitive parenting" and the desirability of certain attachment behaviors are not universally defined and require a culturally humble

Conclusion & Summary

In conclusion, Bowlby's Attachment Theory not only describes Amira's challenges but also offers a clear explanatory framework. Her behaviors are not random; they represent a coherent set of strategies that arise from emotional insecurity.

Her separation anxiety indicates a fragile secure base and suggests a working model that questions the reliability of her caregivers. Additionally, her limited communication and social engagement are logical outcomes for a child who does not feel safe enough to explore her social environment.

By recognizing these behaviors as expressions of unmet attachment needs, we can change our approach from merely managing behavior to focusing on relationship-based healing. Our role is to provide the consistent, sensitive, and predictable care that will help her build a new, secure internal working model, ultimately enabling her to explore, connect, and thrive.



Analysing the Interplay of Nature and Nurture



Amira's presentation is not due to a single cause, but a dynamic interaction between her biological predispositions and her environmental experiences.

Nature (Biological Determinants)

- Amira's innate temperament may predispose her to exhibit a more cautious or sensitive behavioral style, which serves as her biological foundation (World Health Organization, 2022)

Nurture (Environmental Determinants)

- Early experiences: The quality of her primary caregiving relationships has significantly shaped her internal working model of the world, influencing her expectations of safety and reliability (Bowlby, 2008).
- Current Stressor: The major transition of starting nursery acts as a powerful environmental stressor, triggering her underlying vulnerabilities.

Our Intervention

Our nursery must function as a powerful, positive, nurturing force, supporting Amira's unique nature and providing the safety she needs to thrive.



Reference List

- Ainsworth, M.D.S., Blehar, M.C., Waters, E. and Wall, S.N., 2015. Patterns of attachment: A psychological study of the strange situation. Psychology press.
- Bergin, C. and Bergin, D., 2009. Attachment in the classroom. Educational psychology review, 21(2), pp.141-170.
- Bowlby, J., 2008. A secure base: Parent-child attachment and healthy human development. Basic books.
- Brodie, K. (2024). John Bowlby's Attachment Theory and Developmental Phases. [online] Early Years TV. Available at: <https://www.earlyyears.tv/john-bowlbys-attachment-theory-and-developmental-phases/>.
- Department for Education (2024). Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework (EYFS). [online] GOV.UK. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2>.
- Nutbrown, C., Atherton, F. and Clough, P., 2013. Inclusion in the early years.
- World Health Organization (2022). Mental health. [online] World Health Organization. Available at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response>.

THANK YOU