

Supporting early childhood development: Attachment theory and Amira's case.

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John Bowlby Attachment theory.

- The Attachment theory was created by John Bowlby. It explains why young children form strong attachments with their caregivers.
- **Key facts**
- Strong attachment improves confidence, allowing them to explore and play.
- Inconsistent or weak attachment increase withdrawal or anxiety
- Early bonds shape children's view and trust relationships.

Key concepts of attachment.

- **According to Ainsworth's studies, there are 3 types of attachment:**
- **Secure attachment:**
 - Amira would feel safe, explore her classroom, and socialize with staff and other children.
 - She would not feel distress when separated.
- **Insecure attachment (avoidant):**
 - Avoids her caregiver and does not show emotions such as distress when separated.
- **Insecure attachment (resistant):**
 - Distressed when separated, clingy, and difficult to settle.
 - This is linked with Amira's behavior.
- **Separation anxiety:**
 - Distress when her parents leave.
- Attachment experiences influence children's future social behavior (Ainsworth et al., 1978).

Why is Bowlby theory relevant to early years?

- Secure attachment predicts social, emotional and cognitive development.
- Helps professionals understand separation anxiety, social engagement and communication for nursery aged children.
- **Why it matters in Early years (Birth to 5)**
- Matches Birth to 5 Matters (2021) guidance about the importance of secure, trusting relationships.
- Allows practitioners to understand behavioral separation anxiety or.
- Allows practitioners to strengthen their knowledge about behavioral anxiety and how to make it easier for children to feel confident in socializing.
- (Bowlby, 1969; Birth to 5 Matters, 2019).

Applying theory to Amira.

- **Displaying anxiety** when separated from carers could indicate a possible **insecure attachment**. **Limited verbal communication** may reflect Amira's **emotional stress** or uncertainty in the new environment. **Difficulty engaging in group play** reflects the **social-emotional impact of attachment struggles**.

Nature and nurture in Amira's development.

- **Nature vs Nurture**
- Nature is the DNA inherited from our parents and relatives, and nurture is how our environment shapes us.
- **Amira's development:**
 - **Nature:**
 - In Amira's case, she may naturally be shy or anxious.
 - Her brain development can indicate how she handles stressful situations.
 - Her natural language could contribute to communication barriers.
 - **Nurture:**
 - Introducing her to a new environment (nursery) could contribute to her feeling anxious.
 - Support from regular staff allows her to feel safe.
 - Socializing with other children will make her feel more confident.
- **In conclusion:**
 - In Amira's situation, both inherited traits and environmental experiences influence child development (McLeod, 2024).

Practical strategies/ interventions.

- **Gradual separation:**
 - This can include short periods of time separated from carers, then gradually increasing her session time at nursery, while ensuring she is not separated for too long as this could harm Amira's development.
 - A consistent key worker to collect Amira from drop-off helps build a trusting bond.
 - Structured play, praising, and regularly reassuring Amira.
- **Responsive care:**
 - Offer Amira comfort when she's feeling anxious or upset. This can include a comfort toy from home or providing a nursery one (e.g., teddy or dummy).
 - Comforters provide a sense of security and reassurance (Baby City, n.d.).
- **Small group play:**
 - Encourage Amira to play with 1–2 peers, slowly increasing the group size over time.
- **Communication cues:**
Use **basic language** and **flash cards with pictures** to support understanding.

What are the usefulness and limitations of Bowlby's theory?

- **Usefulness:**
- Helps us understand Amira's **anxiety**.
- Supported by research showing attachment is key to **socio-emotional growth** (Ainsworth et al., 1978; *Strange Situation* study).
- Provides a **clear framework for professionals** to understand early childhood behavior.
- **Limitations:**
- Early experiences do not always affect **future development**.
- Theory is heavily focused on **early attachment** and does not address later cognitive and social development.
- Bowlby's theory assumes children form an attachment to **one primary caregiver**, typically the mother. However, children often form **multiple attachments**, including fathers, grandparents, or other caregivers (Rutter, 1981).
- Primarily based on **Western culture**, which may not be applicable to other cultural patterns (Kagan, 1984).

Reference list

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