



Assessment component 1- (individual presentation) – 10 mins

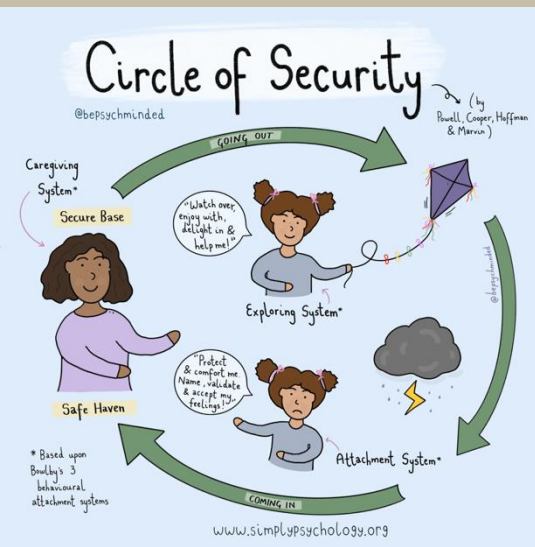
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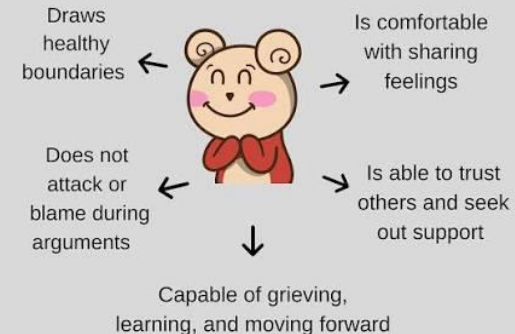
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Secure Attachment

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Bowlby's Attachment Theory

- Bowlby's Attachment Theory highlights how critical early emotional bonds between children and their main carers are, and the profound effect these connections have on emotional growth, social skills, and psychological wellbeing. Bowlby (1969) put forward the idea that attachment is an inbuilt behavioural mechanism: infants are naturally driven to stay close to people they know and trust, especially when they feel afraid, upset, or unsure. These instincts keep children safe and help them build a deep sense of security.
- In the early years, having a secure attachment lays the groundwork for being able to manage feelings well, get along with others, and explore the world. Bowlby (1988) described how a carer who is consistently attentive acts as a *secure base* — a child can go off and discover new things, knowing they have somewhere to turn for comfort and reassurance whenever they need it. For instance, if a young child finds themselves in an unknown place and feels worried, they will look to their carer for support. When that person responds with warmth and reliability, the child feels protected and slowly gains the confidence to explore freely.
- What's more, these early bonds shape how children view themselves and other people in the future. Bowlby (1973) explained that children build what are known as *internal working models* based on their experiences with carers. These mental frameworks influence what they expect from relationships — whether they believe others will be there for them and offer support — and guide how they connect with people later in life.
- Ainsworth and colleagues (1978) added further evidence, showing that how responsive a carer is directly links to the type and strength of attachment a child develops. Importantly, early attachment does not set a child's future in stone; their development is also shaped by their natural personality, other relationships they form, and the world around them.
- This theory carries great practical value in health and social care, particularly in early childhood settings. Those working with young children can put these ideas into practice by building steady, trustworthy relationships, responding gently and thoughtfully to children's emotional needs, and creating environments that feel safe and predictable. This approach helps children feel secure, grow in confidence, and take part more fully in social experiences and learning. All in all, Attachment Theory is an essential tool for understanding how the care children receive in their earliest years shapes every part of their development.

Bowlby's Attachment Theory to Shona's situation

1. Separation Anxiety and Emotional Growth

Shona feels worried when her carers drop her off at nursery. Bowlby's theory gives clear insight into this: she is dealing with being apart from the people she is closest to, while also getting used to a new place. She may feel unsure whether she is safe, or whether her family will come back for her. Importantly, this distress does not mean she has an unhealthy attachment — even children with strong, secure bonds can feel upset during times of change or separation.

As a practitioner, I would support Shona by giving her a regular, consistent key person who greets her warmly every day, offers comfort when she is upset, and helps her feel safe in the nursery setting. I would also work alongside her family to put in place a gentle settling-in plan and a steady, familiar goodbye routine. These steps will help Shona build emotional security and feel more at ease being away from home (Department for Education, n.d.).

• 2. Limited Verbal Skills and Cognitive Progress

Shona's developing speech can make it harder for her to say how she feels, tell others what she needs, or ask for comfort. From an attachment point of view, when a child feels safe with someone they trust, they slowly grow the confidence to explore, communicate, and learn. That said, Bowlby's theory cannot fully explain language development on its own — a delay in talking should never be assumed to be caused by attachment issues.

I would build a close, trusting bond with Shona by speaking gently, using clear short sentences, offering simple choices, and giving her plenty of time to reply. I would use picture cards, signs, songs, stories, and play to encourage her to communicate, without pushing her to speak. I would keep her family updated on her progress, and if worries continue, I would follow nursery policy to seek extra help — such as referral to a speech and language therapist if needed.

3. **Finding Group Play Hard and Social Confidence**

Shona's reluctance to join in with group activities may be linked to feeling unsettled or unsure around new adults and children. Bowlby's theory explains that children only feel ready to explore and join in when they have a strong sense of safety. If Shona is still focused on feeling secure or looking for reassurance, she will have less confidence to approach other children or take part in shared play.

To help her build social skills, I would start by playing with her one-to-one as her trusted key person, then slowly introduce play with just one or two familiar children. Activities like building, puzzles, role-play, and sharing stories are ideal — they naturally teach turn-taking, cooperation, and confidence. I would celebrate every small step she takes, and always let her join larger groups in her own time, never forcing her to take part.

4. **Physical Confidence and Exploration**

While Bowlby's work centres on emotional bonds, it also supports understanding physical development. When Shona feels safe and supported, she will be more willing to move around the nursery, try outdoor play equipment, and join in activities that build balance, coordination, and movement. If she feels anxious, she is far less likely to venture into new or unfamiliar spaces.

I would create a steady, predictable environment where Shona can be active knowing she has support nearby. For example, I would join her in the outdoor area at first, then step back gradually as she gains confidence to explore on her own. I would also keep a close eye on her physical skills, and discuss any areas of concern openly with her carers.

Developing a support plan for Shona

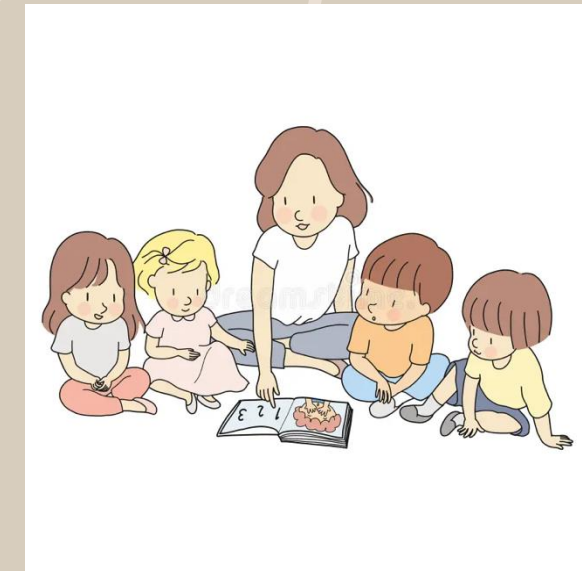
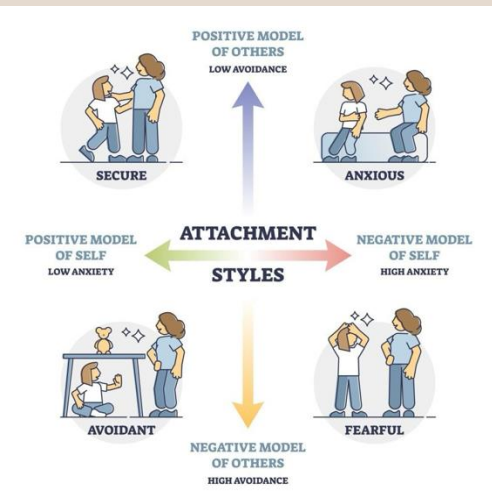
The following actions apply Bowlby's theory to Shona's individual needs.

Developmental area	Support strategy	Intended outcome
Emotional	Provide a consistent key person, comfort and a predictable goodbye routine.	Shona gradually feels safer and manages separation more confidently.
Social	Introduce one-to-one play before small-group activities.	Shona develops confidence, friendships and cooperation skills.
Cognitive and communication	Use stories, visual aids, simple language and responsive play.	Shona has more opportunities to express herself and participate in learning.
Physical	Offer supported indoor and outdoor play, allowing gradual exploration.	Shona develops confidence in movement and physical activities.

The support plan should be developed in partnership with Shona's carers, reviewed regularly and adjusted according to her progress. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) emphasises children's learning, development, safety and care, while Department for Education guidance highlights the importance of trusting relationships and sensitive settling-in arrangements.



Practical Strategies to Support Shona's Development Using Bowlby's Attachment Theory



Strategy 1: Assign a Dedicated, Consistent Key Person Core concept: Secure base Shona will be assigned one consistent key practitioner who takes primary responsibility for nurturing a trusting, reliable bond with her. This adult will greet her each morning, engage in shared play, and respond attentively to both her emotional well-being and practical care needs. How to put this into practice Greet Shona with the same member of staff every day wherever possible. Set aside one-to-one time through activities such as puzzles, drawing, sharing books, and building with construction sets. Closely observe her facial expressions, body language, and behaviour to identify when she needs comfort or, alternatively, quiet personal space. Designate a familiar backup practitioner to cover during the key person's absences, so consistency is maintained.

Theoretical & policy basis Bowlby (1988) states that children thrive when they have a trusted caregiver who acts as a secure base from which to explore the world. Ainsworth et al. (1978) further highlight that sensitivity and timely responsiveness form the foundation of healthy attachment. Additionally, the UK Department for Education's early years guidance confirms that a key person's role is to build an enduring relationship with the child and their family. Key reflective point Having a consistent key person will help Shona feel sufficiently safe to explore her surroundings and express herself. Importantly, anxiety should not be interpreted as proof that Shona has an insecure attachment; it may simply reflect the natural process of adjusting to a new environment. The focus must be on building trust, not applying labels to her attachment style.

Strategy 2: Implement a Gentle, Phased Settling-In Plan Core concept: Safe haven · Separation anxiety Shona's visible distress when her carers leave indicates that saying goodbye is currently difficult. A carefully structured settling-in process will help her get to know the nursery environment and learn to trust the staff looking after her.

How to put this into practice Where feasible, arrange preliminary visits so Shona can come in alongside her carer before full sessions begin. In the early stages, invite the carer to stay for a short agreed period while Shona becomes familiar with the room. Establish a clear, consistent goodbye routine — for example, a hug, a wave, and simple reassurance that the carer will return. Following departure, offer comfort through her key person rather than expecting tears to stop immediately. Where nursery policy permits, allow Shona to have family photographs or a personal comfort item with her. Theoretical basis Bowlby (1973) described how children react emotionally when separated from people they rely on for safety; distress occurs when that sense of security feels out of reach. Key reflective point Separation anxiety is not an indication of poor care at home or an attachment disorder. Staff should never force abrupt partings or distract Shona without acknowledging how she feels. Instead, predictability and gentle reassurance will help her see the nursery as a safe place. Progress should be measured by whether she gradually calms down, accepts comfort, and joins in activities — not by whether she stops crying instantly.

Strategy 3: Nurture Emotional Confidence Through Sensitive, Responsive Care Core concept: Safe haven When Shona becomes upset, practitioners should respond with calm, consistent reassurance. The goal is to help her recognise and name her feelings, and slowly build the skills to manage them independently. How to put this into practice Speak to Shona at her eye level, using a soft, gentle tone. Validate her feelings simply and clearly — for instance: *“You’re missing Mummy. You feel sad, don’t you? You’re safe here, and I’ll stay with you.”* Provide a quiet, restful space where she can take time away from noise and group activity if she wishes. Use visual emotion cards, pictures of feelings, stories, and songs to introduce vocabulary such as *happy, sad, worried, and calm*. Offer physical comfort only when it matches Shona’s own signals and preferences, and always in line with safeguarding guidelines. Theoretical & policy basis Bowlby (1988) identified consistent, reliable care as the bedrock of emotional safety. Ainsworth et al. (1978) also linked caregivers’ sensitive, prompt responses to the development of secure attachments. This approach aligns with current early years guidance, which recommends helping children understand and communicate their feelings through warm, supportive relationships. Key reflective point Over time, repeated reassuring responses will teach Shona that adults are dependable when she needs help — strengthening her ability to regulate her emotions and grow in confidence. It is vital to remember that emotional development happens at different rates for every child; she may need ongoing reassurance, and should not be expected to become independent straight away.

Strategy 4: Encourage Communication Through Pressure-Free Interaction Core concept: Internal working models · Sensitive responsiveness Shona’s limited spoken communication may make it harder for her to share what she needs, make friends, or ask for help. Practitioners should create plenty of opportunities for interaction without insisting or putting pressure on her to speak. How to put this into practice Use short, straightforward sentences and give Shona extra time to process and respond. Follow her lead during play, describing what she is doing: *“Look — you’re building such a tall tower!”* Share picture books, sing well-known songs, and use puppets to invite engagement and turn-taking. Value all forms of communication equally — gestures, pointing, facial expressions, and selecting from visual prompts are all valid ways for her to make herself understood. Ask her family about the language(s) used at home, her favourite interests, and how she usually communicates there. Keep a careful record of her progress; if concerns remain, consult the nursery Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) and other relevant professionals for further guidance. Theoretical & policy basis Attachment theory explains that secure, trusting relationships give children the confidence to explore, learn, and interact with others — so a trusted key person helps create the emotional safety Shona needs to join in. Communication and language is also identified as a prime area of learning within the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework. Key reflective point While feeling secure will support Shona’s willingness to communicate, attachment does not explain every aspect of language development. Her current level of speech may also reflect individual developmental timing, hearing ability, patterns of language use at home, or specific communication needs. Practitioners should not assume that separation anxiety is the sole cause of any difficulty

Consider both biological and environmental influences (‘nature and nurture’) and discuss their role in shaping psychological development.

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Psychological development describes how children’s thinking, feelings, actions, communication and relationships evolve with age. Skills built in early life underpin emotional wellbeing, social connections, cognitive ability and physical growth. The nature–nurture debate looks at biological and environmental impacts: nature is inherited traits; nurture is the child’s world — family, learning, culture and life experiences.

New to nursery, 3-year-old Shona shows separation anxiety, limited verbal skills and struggles with group play. Grasping both nature and nurture is vital here; practitioners must not guess causes — these behaviours come from multiple interacting factors, so careful observation is required.

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