

The importance of early attachment.



“Mother love in infancy and childhood is as important for mental health as are vitamins and proteins for physical health.” – Bowlby, 1953.

Toolkit Contents:

This toolkit aims to make caregivers aware of the importance of creating and securing a healthy attachment with the child. This toolkit gives an insight into the attachment theory, and the IWM's (Internal Working Models) that will shape your child's self image, view of the world & also how they interact in relationships in adulthood.

“Life is best organised as a series of daring events from a secure base” – John Bowlby.

Attachment theory introduction:

John Bowlby, a London born psychologist developed the attachment theory in children. The theory suggests that the bonds made early in childhood pave the foundations for how we perceive relationships in adulthood.

Bowlby's theory was later adapted by Mary Ainsworth's "Strange Situation" experiment identifying different attachment styles

For example: a child who formed an early & secure bond with their primary caregiver may go on to have better self esteem, be better at managing stress and regulating emotion. Children who received & maintained an early attachment have more chance of becoming successful and well rounded as adults.

“If you pick up a baby every time they cry – they will learn to manipulate you”

Misinformation like this can be harmful when raising children. A child will not learn to manipulate you, but responding to a child's emotional need is one of the many ways a secure attachment is formed.

This is how trust & security are built when bonding.

You cannot spoil a baby/child with love and affection.

Children who receive no response when they are upset will begin to suppress their emotions in adulthood – possibly causing many other issues.

How do I give my child a secure attachment?

The attachment theory and updated supporting theories suggest that babies form a bond with the caregiver that meets their emotional needs the most. From birth, babies are solely dependant on another person to feed them and protect them. But as children get older, they begin recognise this. The theory suggests that babies begin to 'coo, babble & smile' at their caregivers to ensure that they don't leave them.

Babies recognise the cycle of crying, their needs being met and they begin to form a trust with the person/people who answer to their emotional cues. This secure bond will give the child a healthy view of others, because they know they will have their safe person to depend on.

How do I spot an insecure attachment?

Signs of insecure attachment could be clinically similar to conditions such as ASD, ADHD and Anxiety & Depression. This is because adults who experienced an insecure attachment style could exhibit a number of behaviour patterns.

Becoming familiar with the three Insecure attachment styles may help to identify which Insecure style your child might have.

How to support a child with an insecure attachment.

Seek support from others, surround yourself with grounded secure people. Psychotherapy – CBT. Be patient, secure attachments take time, as does healing.

Attachment styles



Attachment Styles & Adulthood.

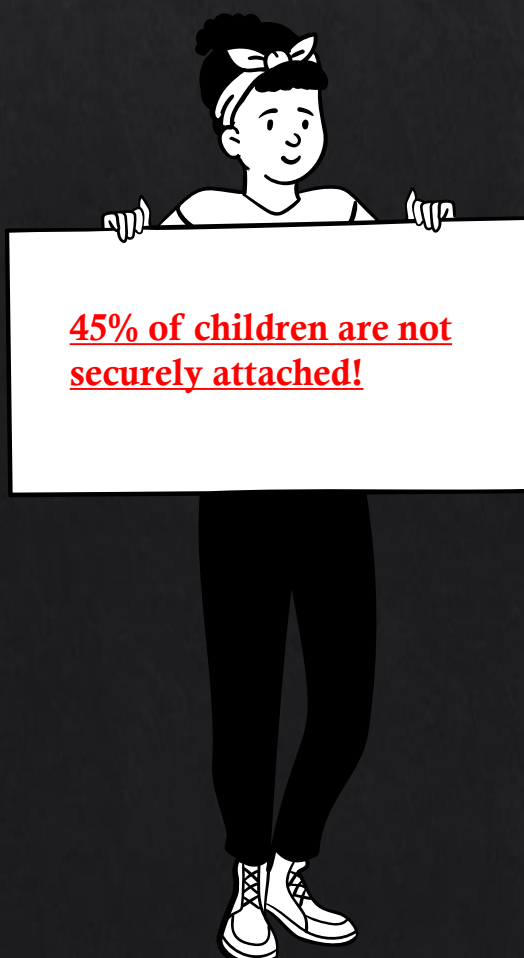
The attachment style we experience as children, define how we view ourselves, the world & relationships in adulthood.

Secure – Well rounded, emotionally stable optimistic individuals.

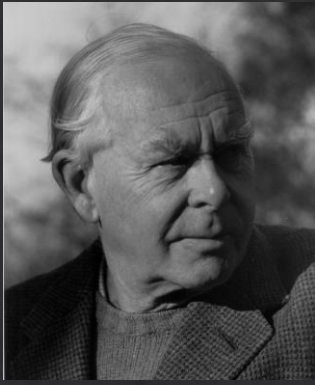
Ambivalent – Clingy, highly emotional, unpredictable behaviour.

Avoidant – Supressed emotion, heightened anxiety. Very poor self image.

Disorganised – Unable to manage stress & regulate emotion. No sense of love or security.



Attachment theory



John Bowlby and the attachment theory.

Bowlby, a psychologist most famously known for his work and theory surrounding childhood attachment and the implications different infant attachment styles would have in adulthood.

The theory suggests that babies are born with an cognitively hard-wired need to bond with their caregivers – in most circumstances, their mother.

Earlier theories, psychologists such as Sigmund Freud suggested that babies bond with their caregivers through feeding however, through research Bowlby discovered that just feeding babies was not enough to encourage a bond.

With this, came Bowlby's Monotropic Theory Of Attachment – this is where babies seek out a stronger bond with one caregiver (Usually their Mother).

His literature suggests that this is because in earlier times children usually only had one caregiver to depend on for food and protection. He compared this primal instinct to the theory of evolution & natural selection.

Bowlby states that if no attachment is formed, it could have detrimental affects on the child in their adult life.

What happens if an attachment is formed & later interrupted?

This is called Maternal Deprivation (see Page 4).

As babies get older, they mature developmentally and as they begin to interact with others, their Internal Working Model (IWM) shapes how they view others & themselves. (See page 2)

Stages of attachment:

Antenatal (Pre birth)

6-8 weeks old

6-8 months old

18 months – 2years

2 Years+

Bowlby argues that if no attachment is present, children have a 'sensitive' period until around five years of age.

The sensitive period is considered a final chance at creating any sort of secure attachment.



Mary Ainsworth – Strange Situation

Mary Ainsworth was a Canadian Psychologist who had moved to London.

She adapted the attachment theory from Bowlby to assess the response in children when their primary caregiver leaves the room, and they are then left with an unfamiliar person.

This experiment was conducted in 8 phases.

Phase 1 – Baby and parent taken into a room with 2 chairs and a double sided mirror.

Phase 2 – Child introduced to the toys.

Phase 3 – Stranger enters and begins playing with child.

Phase 4 – Caregiver leaves room, stranger stops interacting with child.

Phase 5 – Caregiver returns and soothes baby.

Phase 6 – Both caregiver and stranger leave the room for a short period.

Phase 7 – Stranger re-enters room, and makes an effort to soothe the child.

Phase 8 – Mum returns, soothes baby and researchers assess the child's response to the interactions. During the experiment, Ainsworth was able to identify different styles of attachment & categorise which child, had which attachment style.

Main and Solomon (1986) later identified the fourth attachment style.

Early Attachment

What if attachment/bonding is interrupted?

This is called maternal deprivation.

Maternal Deprivation.

What is maternal deprivation?

The maternal deprivation theory stems from Bowlby & his attachment theory.

As previously mentioned, early attachment has a critical period of 2.5 years (30 months). If attachment is not formed within this time scale, it may never form at all with serious consequences for the child in future.

Why does maternal separation occur?

Maternal deprivation occurs when an early attachment begins to form, but then mother & child become separated. This can happen for a number of reasons, for example:

Premature Birth.

Drug Addiction.

Homelessness.

Fleeing Domestic Abuse.

Mental Health.

Psychical Health problems.

IWM – Internal Working Model.

The IWM Theory also developed by Bowlby argues that once an attachment style is formed, behaviour patterns and the view we have on others later becomes an unconscious cognitive response.

Bowlby states that by age 3, children begin to retain information & memory and IWM's begin to form.

Internal Working Models are said to automatically shape the way we interact with others. They can also dictate emotion, and the way we view relationships as a whole. If a child faced an unstable & insecure attachment, they could automatically start future relationships with an imprinted negative bias.

This can leave insecure adults with a negative self-image, and poor trust in others meaning they may never develop a healthy relationship with a love interest.

“We do as we have been done by.” – John Bowlby.



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