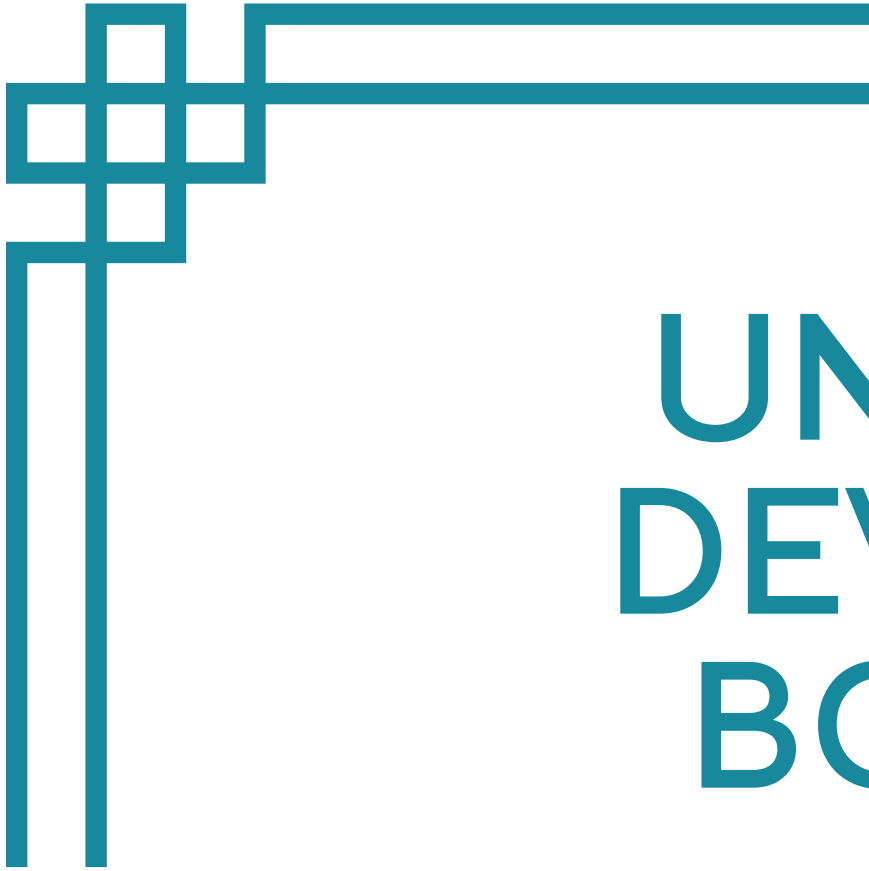




UNDERSTANDING ISAAC'S DEVELOPMENT THROUGH BOWLBY'S ATTACHMENT THEORY

Psychology in Health and Social Care (LCHS4010) – Individual
Presentation

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INTRODUCTION TO ISAAC



Isaac is a four-year-old boy attending a Children's Centre in London.

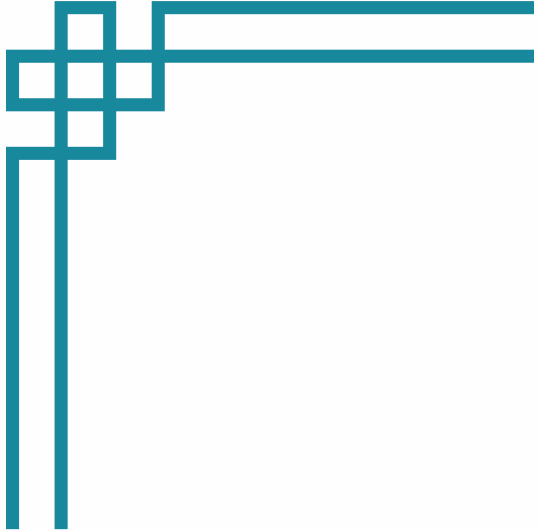
Family Context:

- Single mother with post-natal depression
- Low confidence and limited social support
- Recent relocation to London
- Disrupted childcare arrangements over two years

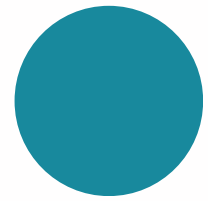


Staff Concerns:

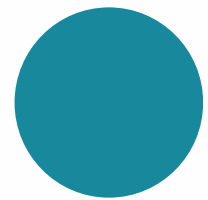
- Quiet and withdrawn during free play
- Distress during separation from mother
- Delayed language development
- Difficulty joining group activities
- Clingy behaviour and sleep difficulties



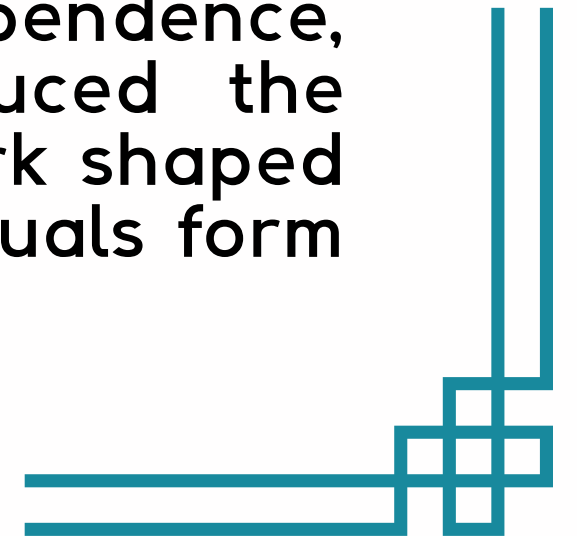
BOWLBY'S ATTACHMENT THEORY



Bowlby (1969) defined attachment as a strong emotional bond formed between a child and their primary caregiver. This bond is essential for healthy emotional, social, and cognitive development. The caregiver serves as a source of safety, comfort, and emotional security, enabling the child to explore the world with confidence.



Secure attachment develops when caregiving is consistent, sensitive, and responsive to the child's needs. This fosters independence, resilience, and positive self-esteem. Bowlby also introduced the concept of the Internal Working Model — a mental framework shaped by early attachment experiences that influences how individuals form and maintain relationships throughout life.



KEY CONCEPTS

◆ **Secure Attachment:** A consistent and sensitive caregiver response that reliably meets the child's emotional and physical needs, forming the foundation of trust and safety.

◆ **Internal Working Model:** A mental representation of self and others, shaped by early attachment experiences, that influences how a child forms and navigates future relationships.

◆ **Separation Anxiety:** The distress experienced by a child when separated from their primary attachment figure, reflecting the strength and significance of the attachment bond.

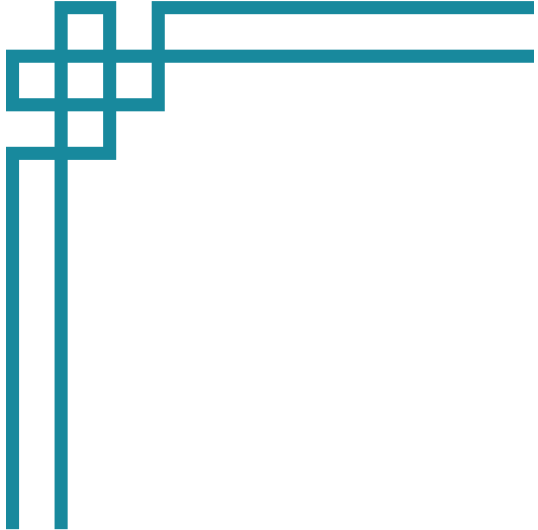
KEY CONCEPTS

Maternal Deprivation

Prolonged or permanent separation from the primary caregiver disrupts healthy emotional and cognitive development. Bowlby argued that deprivation in early years can have lasting negative effects on a child's mental health, social functioning, and ability to form secure relationships later in life.

Secure Base

A trusted caregiver who provides safety, comfort, and reassurance, enabling the child to explore the world with confidence. The secure base concept highlights how a reliable attachment figure encourages independence and resilience, forming the foundation for healthy emotional development.



APPLYING ATTACHMENT THEORY TO ISAAC



Isaac's distress on separation and clingy behaviour indicate attachment insecurity (Bowlby, 1969). His mother's post-natal depression may reduce her emotional availability, making it harder to respond consistently to Isaac's needs. Disrupted childcare arrangements over two years have further limited caregiving consistency, undermining his sense of security. As a result, Isaac shows less confidence in independent exploration and struggles to engage with peers.

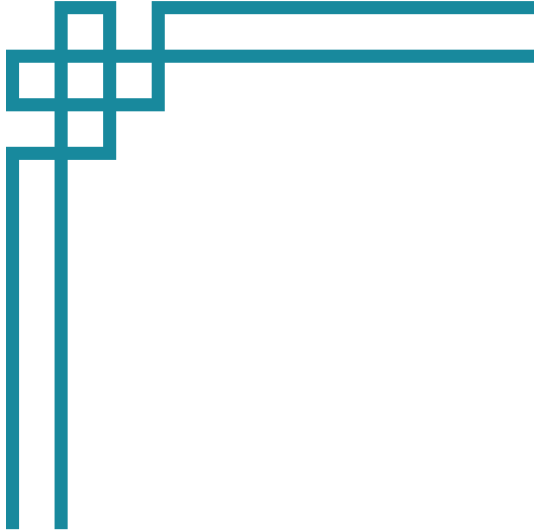


Key Behaviours & Causal Factors:

- Withdrawn during free play → insecure attachment base
- Separation distress & clinginess → inconsistent caregiving
- Language delay → reduced emotional engagement
- Social difficulties → limited confidence and trust
- Sleep difficulties → heightened anxiety and stress

(Howe, 2011)





PIES DEVELOPMENT



Physical

Sleep difficulties impact Isaac's energy levels and concentration throughout the day, limiting his ability to engage fully in activities and routines at the Children's Centre.



Intellectual

Language delays affect Isaac's communication skills and learning capacity, making it harder for him to express needs, follow instructions, and engage in age-appropriate learning.



Emotional

Separation anxiety and clingy behaviour indicate emotional insecurity, suggesting Isaac has not developed a secure attachment base from which to manage stress and self-regulate.



PIES DEVELOPMENT

Isaac's development across all four PIES domains is shaped by his early attachment experiences and the instability in his caregiving environment.

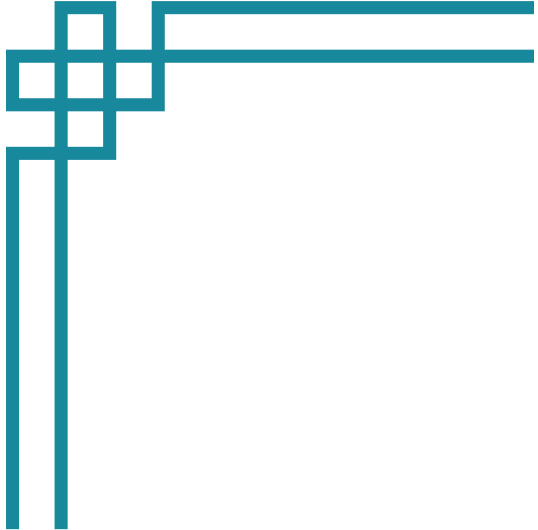
Physical: Sleep difficulties and disrupted routines impact Isaac's energy levels, concentration, and overall physical wellbeing. Inconsistent caregiving contributes to unsettled sleep patterns.

Intellectual: Delayed language development limits Isaac's ability to communicate, learn, and engage with others. Reduced interaction with a responsive caregiver may slow cognitive and linguistic growth.

Emotional: Separation anxiety and clingy behaviour indicate emotional insecurity. Without a consistent, sensitive caregiver, Isaac struggles to regulate his emotions and feel safe when apart from his mother.

Social: Difficulty joining group activities and withdrawing during free play affect Isaac's ability to form friendships and build social confidence. Limited peer interaction further restricts his social development.

All four domains are deeply interconnected. Insecure attachment, rooted in disrupted caregiving and maternal post-natal depression, creates a cycle in which emotional insecurity limits social engagement, language development, and physical wellbeing. Addressing attachment needs is therefore central to supporting Isaac's holistic development.



NATURE AND NURTURE INFLUENCES



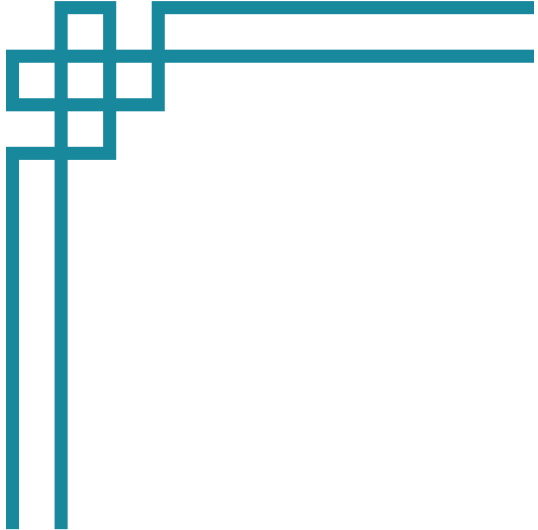
NATURE

- Genetic predispositions influencing temperament and emotional regulation
- Biological vulnerability linked to maternal post-natal depression
- Innate temperament affecting how Isaac responds to stress and separation
- Inherited tendencies shaping emotional sensitivity and coping capacity



NURTURE

- Maternal post-natal depression reducing emotional availability and responsiveness
 - Disrupted childcare over two years limiting consistent caregiving
 - Limited social support network for mother and child
 - Relocation to London increasing instability and reducing familiar attachments
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ATTACHMENT-BASED SUPPORT STRATEGIES



Key Person Approach: Assign Isaac a consistent, trusted adult at the Children's Centre. This stable relationship provides a secure base, builds trust over time, and helps reduce separation anxiety by offering reliable emotional support each day.

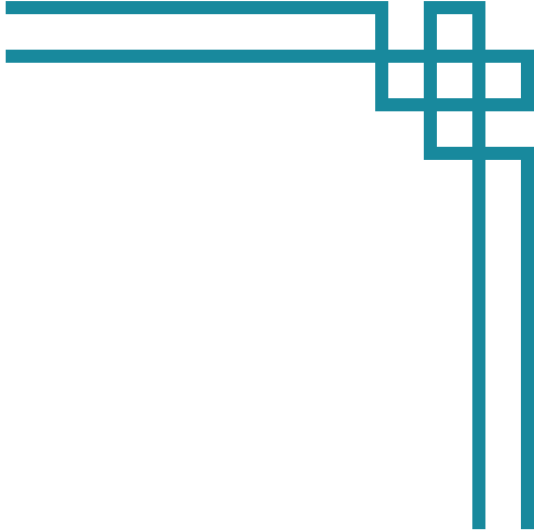
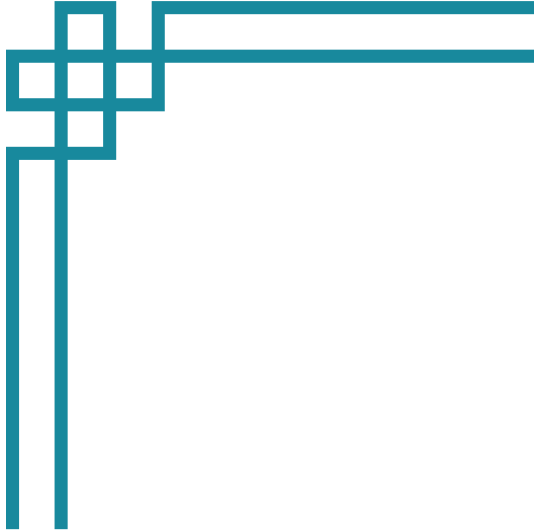


Predictable Routines: Establish clear, consistent daily routines to promote stability and reduce anxiety. Knowing what to expect helps Isaac feel safe and secure, supporting his emotional regulation and confidence in the setting.



Emotional Coaching: Support Isaac in recognising, naming, and expressing his emotions. Practitioners can model emotional language and validate his feelings, helping him develop self-awareness and the communication skills needed to engage socially.





ATTACHMENT-BASED SUPPORT STRATEGIES

Gradual Separation Support

Planned short separations are introduced progressively to help Isaac build confidence in the absence of his primary caregiver. By gradually increasing time apart in a safe, predictable environment, Isaac can develop trust that his caregiver will return. This reduces separation anxiety and helps him form a more secure internal working model (Bowlby, 1969).

Positive Play Opportunities



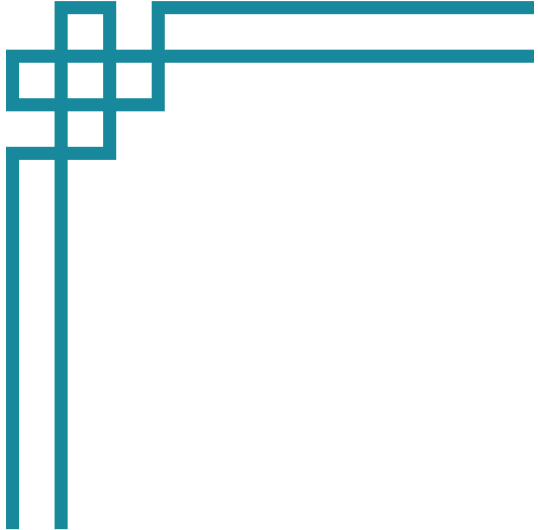
Structured and free play activities are used to encourage Isaac to safely explore his environment and engage with peers. Supportive adults provide a secure base from which Isaac can develop social skills, language, and confidence. Positive play fosters secure relationships, increases wellbeing, and supports emotional and social development (Howe, 2011).

SUPPORT FOR ISAAC

Early Years Practitioners & Speech and Language Therapist: provide daily emotional support and monitoring; assess and address language delays to improve communication and learning outcomes.

Health Visitor & Family Support Services: monitor the wellbeing of Isaac and his family; reduce social isolation and provide parenting support to strengthen the home environment.

Mental Health Services & Multi-Agency Coordination: support the mother's post-natal depression to improve her emotional availability; coordinated multi-agency working is essential to ensure consistent, holistic support.



CRITICAL EVALUATION OF BOWLBY'S ATTACHMENT THEORY

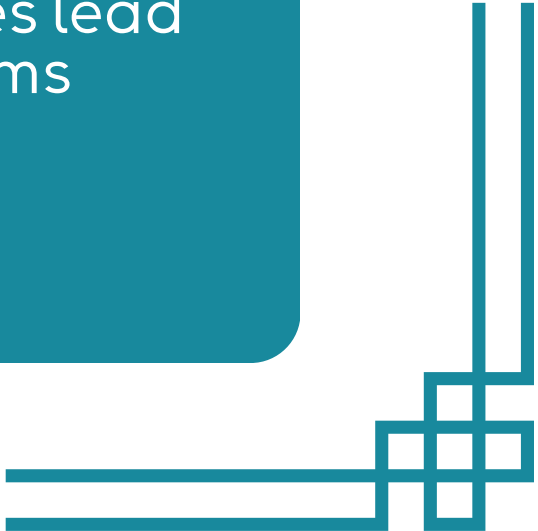


STRENGTHS

- Emphasises the importance of early relationships in shaping emotional development
- Effectively explains Isaac's behaviours such as clinginess and separation distress
- Widely applied across health, social care, and early years practice
- Provides a useful framework for planning attachment-based interventions



LIMITATIONS

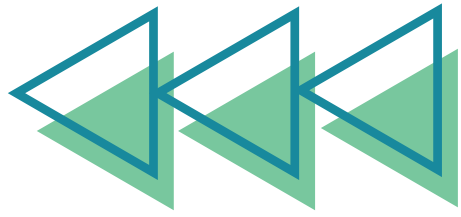
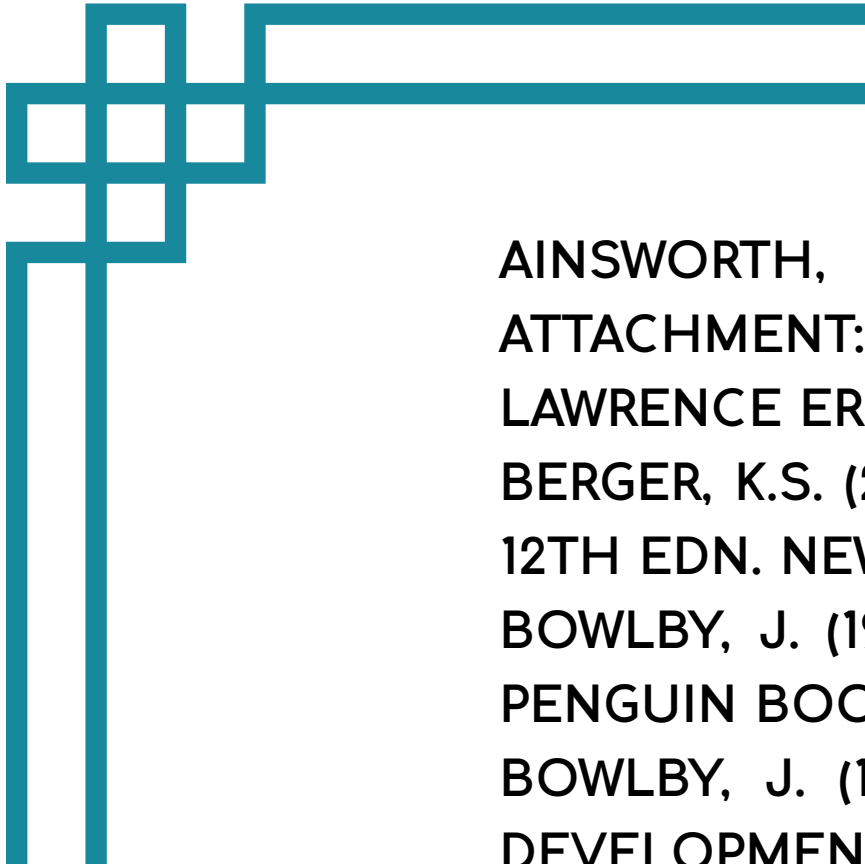
- Focuses heavily on the mother-child dyad, limiting broader application
 - May overlook the significant roles of other caregivers and family members
 - Cultural and family diversity can affect attachment patterns differently
 - Not all early attachment difficulties lead to long-term developmental problems
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CONCLUSION

Bowlby's Attachment Theory provides a valuable framework for understanding Isaac's developmental challenges, including his separation anxiety, withdrawn behaviour, language delays, and social difficulties. His mother's post-natal depression and the disrupted childcare arrangements over two years have significantly impacted the consistency and sensitivity of caregiving, undermining his sense of emotional security.

Both nature and nurture play important roles in Isaac's development, with environmental influences — particularly limited social support and frequent disruptions — proving especially significant. Attachment-based interventions, including the Key Person Approach, predictable routines, and emotional coaching, offer practical pathways to building secure relationships.

Coordinated multi-agency support — involving early years practitioners, speech and language therapists, health visitors, and mental health services — is essential to improving outcomes for Isaac and his family. Secure, consistent relationships remain the foundation for Isaac's confidence, wellbeing, and healthy future development.



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