

Attachment and Emotional Development: Why Early Bonds Shape Lifelong Wellbeing

I acknowledge the use of Copilot (copilot.microsoft.com) between 1st of February to the 1st of March to help research and check my work, I used the prompts:

1. following the assignment brief please write me a structure to my assignment that I can use as a guideline, giving me better understanding of the work.
2. please can you summarise this source for me.
3. can you provide me with reliable and academic sources for my assignment.

I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated text as my own, I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes and other resources I used before, and after the use of AI tools which I may be asked to provide as evidence.

Introduction: Why Attachment Still Matters Today.

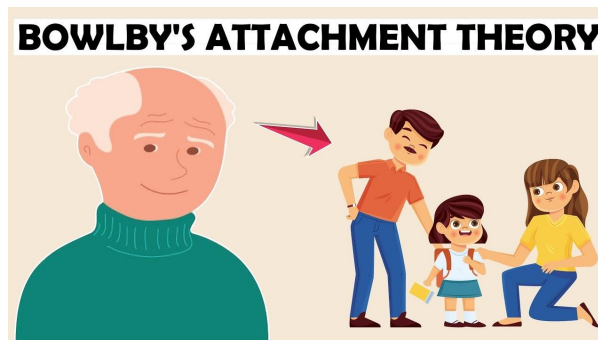
In my experience with working with young children, I have noticed that children respond in many ways to separation, comfort and new surrounding and situations. This happens as some children will look for reassurance in another adult or children, whereas other will become distressed and isolate themselves. these behaviours shown in children reflect with what the NSPCC describes as the emotional bond between a child and their primary caregiver, which they then define as a 'lasting psychological connectedness between human beings' (NSPCC Learning, 2021). In this blog, I am going to discuss how attachment shapes emotional development, compare key theories such as Bowlby and Ainsworth, and will also reflect on the implications for Practice. (NSPCC Learning, 2021)

Key Theories of Attachment.

Bowlby's Evolutionary Theory

Bowlby's attachment theory proposes that infants are biologically programmed to form emotional bonds with caregivers because these relationships increase their chances of survival. He argued that attachment behaviours, such as crying, clinging, and following evolved to keep infants close to protective adults. Bowlby believed that early attachment experiences shape an "internal working model," which influences how children understand relationships, regulate emotions, and respond to stress throughout life. When caregivers are consistently responsive and emotionally available, secure attachment develops; when care is

inconsistent or absent, emotional difficulties may arise. His theory emphasises that attachment is both evolutionary and foundational for healthy emotional development. (The Attachment Project, 2026)



1 - (YouTube, 2023)

Ainsworth's Strange Situation

The Strange Situation was developed by Mary Ainsworth as a structured observational method, that was made to observe infant attachment behaviours. Ainsworth created this method as she noticed that attachment behaviours only became visible in certain situations, such as separation or fear. She wanted a controlled way of observing these behaviours reliably, rather than waiting for them to happen naturally. She did this by creating a sequence of episodes that gradually increased stress for an infant. (Abtahi and Kerns, 2017)

Emotional Regulation

Emotional regulation involves how children monitor, adjust and manage their emotional reactions across a variety of situations, this is evidenced by Abtahi and Kerns (2017) as they state that 'Emotion regulation refers to the ability to adaptively regulate emotions over time'. Attachment has a substantial role in children's emotional development, as there are four categories of attachment that link to how children regulate their emotions, these are secure, avoidant, ambivalent and disorganised which was added later. (Watson, 2026) (Abtahi and Kerns, 2017)

Social relationships

Children's early attachment experiences can play a big part in how they emotionally develop, this can then influence how they form social relationships. When a child's caregiver is warm and responsive they learn to regulate their emotions through affect attunement and affect synchrony, experiences that help children to move from distress to calm and support them in building the foundations of empathy, emotional understanding and social connections. Bowlby and Ainsworth theories can reflect in the finding that 'when a caregiver is responsive and sensitive to the child's emotion signals, the child develops a secure attachment and is

confident that the caregiver is available when needed' (Abtahi and Kerns, 2017) helping children enter friendships with emotional stability and trust, so that over time they can internalise these patterns and use them to guide their behaviour in friendships and social situations. (Jethava et al, 2022)

Factors influencing attachment development

There are many factors that can influence a child's attachment development such as the immediate caregiver to child relationship, also the wider environment that surrounds a child. These factors can be shown through Bronfenbrenner's ecological system.

The microsystem level is where factors such as caregiver sensitivity, emotional availability, routines and caregiver to child interactions directly influence whether a child forms a secure or insecure attachment.

The mesosystem is where attachment is further shaped through connections between key settings, such as how parental stress from work affects caregiving quality at home.

The exosystemic level, this is where influences like parental employment, social support networks, neighbourhood safety and access to resources affect the caregiver's capacity to respond sensitively.

The macrosystem, this included the factors of cultural beliefs, parenting norms and social expectations that shape how caregivers interpret and respond to children's emotional needs.

The chronosystem, this recognises that life transitions, such as divorce, illness and economic changes can change a caregiver's patterns over time, which can then affect the stability of attachment.

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979)

Implications for Practitioners

Creating an emotionally safe environment is central to supporting children's development, this is reinforced through both research and policy. Gaskins et al, (2017) highlights that policies such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) emphasise every child's right to emotional well-being, protection and supportive relationships, however these policies must be applied sensitively and in a way that respects everyone, this means that practitioners must avoid a single universal approach and work in ways that are culturally aware, inclusive and responsive to children's lived experiences. (Gaskins et al, 2017)

In practice, creating emotionally safe environments involves more than following legislation, it also required building trust, understanding the children's emotional cues and adapting to

support and meet diverse needs. Working in an ALN classroom I have seen how important this is, as many of the children that I have worked with need a predictable routine, good communication and a calm and accepting environment to feel secure enough to learn and connect with others. By using the guidance of frameworks such as the UNCRC with respect for every child's background, abilities and the ways that they express themselves, practitioners like myself can create spaces where all children feel understood, valued and emotionally safe.

Conclusion

Overall, early attachment plays a powerful role in shaping children's emotional development and their ability to build healthy social relationships. Research, policy, and practice all highlight the importance of creating emotionally safe, culturally sensitive environments where children feel understood and supported. Frameworks like the UNCRC guide this work, but it is the everyday interactions between practitioners, families, and children including my own experiences in ALN classrooms that truly bring these principles to life and help every child feel secure enough to learn, grow, and connect.

Poverty and Emotional Wellbeing: Understanding the Hidden Impact

When children grow up in poverty it can place a heavy emotional burden on them, shaping not only their daily experiences but also their sense of security and self-worth. Treanor and Troncoso (2024) highlights how poverty can affect children's lives in multiple, interconnected ways, such as limited resources leading to increased stress within the home, which can all undermine emotional wellbeing and stability. Children that live in disadvantaged circumstances often face chronic stress, uncertainty and reduced access to supportive environments, these can all have effects on their confidence, relationships and their overall mental health. This blog is going to explore how poverty affects emotional wellbeing, the theories that help explain it, and what practitioners can do to support children. (Treanor and Troncoso, 2024)

Theoretical Perspectives

The family stress model

The family stress model defines that financial hardship can increase caregiver's emotional distress, this can then lead to disruptions in the quality of caregiver to child interactions. When stress builds for caregivers it can lead to them using harsh or irritable behaviours, this then has a direct impact on children's emotional wellbeing. Negi and Sattler, (2026) found that parenting stress 'significantly predicted harsh parenting' which links to more internalising problems, such as children becoming anxious, withdrawn or emotionally overwhelmed. When caregivers don't show consistent warmth and responsiveness, children

will struggle to develop secure emotional regulation, confidence and adaptive social skills. This makes early childhood a vulnerable period, as the pressures of poverty for caregivers can pass through to children and shape their emotional worlds in lasting ways. (Negi and Sattler, 2026)

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory

The Bronfenbrenner's ecological system shows how poverty shapes children's emotional wellbeing, it does this by showing that development is influenced by multiple interacting layers of a child's environment.

Microsystem

- Poverty increases stress within the home which can affect parent to child relationships making them less stable. This can reduce warmth and emotional support, affecting children's sense of security and emotional regulation.

Mesosystem

- Weak links between home and school, this can be caused by time pressures or limited resources, which can then create confusion and emotional strain for children, affecting their confidence and behaviour.

Exosystem

- Children are indirectly affected by factors, such as unsafe neighbourhoods, limited childcare and parents work instability. These pressures can heighten stress and reduce emotional wellbeing.

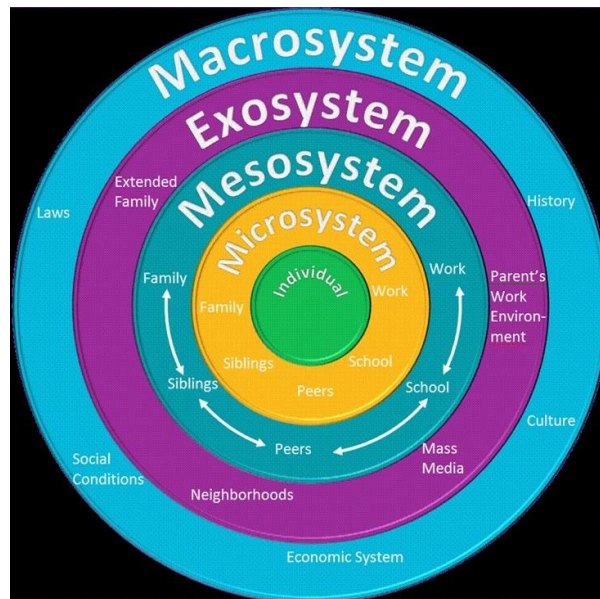
Macrosystem

- Social class and cultural attitudes can shape children's opportunities and how they see themselves. Poverty can lead to stigma, lower self-esteem and fewer emotional resources.

Chronosystem

- Long term poverty compounds stress over time, this can increase the risk of anxiety, emotional dysregulation and difficulties forming secure relationships.

(EBSCO, 2025)



2 - (Pinterest, n.d.)

How poverty impacts emotional wellbeing

Stress and anxiety in children experiencing poverty

Poverty in early childhood can expose children to chronic stress that disrupts their emotional wellbeing. Monks, Mandzufas and Cross (2022) states that 'continuous activation of the body's stress response system' this results in toxic stress, this then overwhelms children's developing ability to regulate their emotions, due to this heightened stress reactivity is linked to anxiety, hypervigilance and emotional dysregulation.

Monks, Mandzufas and Cross (2022) highlights that parents facing economic hardship may have 'limited capacity to provide responsive care and low stress environments' this can cause a rise in children's emotional vulnerability. This is mentioned in Bronfenbrenner's microsystem as it explains how children rely on stable, responsive relationships to regulate stress; however, poverty can reduce parent's ability to provide this. (EBSCO, 2025)

Social exclusion and its emotional impact

Children in poverty are also at risk of social exclusion which can have an impact on their emotional wellbeing, this can happen due to children in poverty often having less opportunities to participate in enriching activities, less access to high quality early education and reduced exposure to stimulating environments. (Monks, Mandzufas and Cross, 2022)

Social exclusion can also be explained through Bronfenbrenner's exosystem and macrosystem as it reinforces through neighbourhoods that are disadvantaged, limited community resources and broader societal inequalities. Children that grow up in

environment that are unstable or have limited opportunities, may have feelings of inferiority or exclusion, which can cause emotional distress.

(EBSCO, 2025)

Behavioural responses to poverty and adversity

Children growing up in poverty can develop behavioural difficulties, this is shown through Bronfenbrenner's microsystem as it highlights how when children lack consistent, responsive caregiving they miss crucial interactions that support their emotional and behavioural regulation. (EBSCO, 2025)

Behaviourally, children may:

- React impulsively
- Struggle with frustration
- Have difficulty following instructions
- Show increased aggression or withdrawal
- Find it harder to manage conflict

(Monks, Mandzufas and Cross, 2022)

Factors that influence outcomes

Children's outcomes are shaped by a combination of socioeconomic, family, and community factors that interact to influence their development. Socioeconomic conditions such as access to nutritious food, stable housing, healthcare, early learning opportunities, and low parental stress create the foundation for healthy growth. Family environments also play a key role, as parental mental health, levels of stress, the availability of responsive caregiving, and exposure to conflict all affect children's emotional and behavioural regulation.

Community and neighbourhood conditions add another layer, where limited services, unsafe environments, and higher exposure to stressors can further restrict children's opportunities to thrive. These challenges often overlap, creating barriers such as food insecurity, overcrowded housing, poor access to healthcare, reduced school engagement, and limited early intervention support. The Family Stress Model helps explain how economic hardship increases parental stress, which can reduce responsive caregiving and lead to harsher interactions, ultimately contributing to poorer emotional, behavioural, and developmental outcomes for children.

(Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2020)

Implications for practitioners

For children that are experiencing poverty The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework is fundamental as it places a legal duty on schools to create safe, nurturing and developmentally rich environments, As the EYFS is underpinned by the Childcare Act 2004, all schools must ensure that children's health, nutrition and wellbeing is supported, this is why many schools will offer breakfast clubs and free school meals as a part of their welfare provision. By schools offering these supporters it can reduce the impact of food insecurity, which then allows children to start the day regulated, fed and ready to learn. When I worked in an EIP room, these expectations shaped our daily routines, as every morning we provided toast so that when the children arrived, they would feel care for, and we also created a quiet, predictable space where they could settle, regulate and feel safe before there session in their mainstream classroom. (Department for Education, 2025)

Conclusion

Children's outcomes are shaped by poverty, family stress and limited resources, which can create barriers to learning, wellbeing and long-term development. Early intervention, stable relationships and consistent routines help reduce these effects, and practitioners play a key role in providing this support. By using evidence-based approaches and creating calm, nurturing environments, schools can help children feel safe, regulated and ready to learn, ensuring disadvantage does not limit their ability to thrive.

Poor Nutrition and Physical Development: Understanding the Foundations of Growth

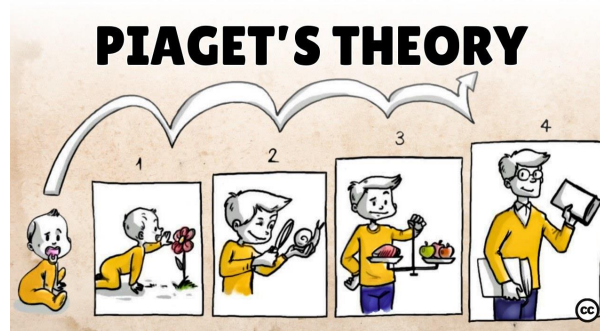
Introduction: why nutrition matters more than we think

Children's early development is shaped by both their nutrition and the learning opportunities that they receive, if these areas are lacking it can affect children's long-term health, growth and academic potential. Many children often miss out on their full developmental potential because of poor diet quality and limited early stimulation. This blog will explore how nutrition shapes physical development, the theories that support this understanding and what practitioners can do to help.

Theoretical perspectives

Biological Maturation – Piaget

Piaget believed that children's cognitive development is closely linked to biological maturation, this means that children's thinking changes as their brains and bodies naturally grow. Development is 'determined by biological maturation and interaction with the environment' (McLeod, 2025) this shows that certain abilities, such as object permanence, symbolic thought, logical reasoning and abstract thinking, will only emerge when a child is biologically ready to understand them. When children start to mature, their cognitive structures become more complex allowing them to move through Piaget's universal stages in a fixed order. This biological readiness sets the limits on what children can learn at each stage, with experience and social interaction building on the foundation that maturation provides. (McLeod, 2025)



3 - (Sprouts, 2016)

WHO developmental frameworks

The World Health Organization (WHO) developmental framework explains that children grow within multiple interconnected environments, from the immediate family to wider community and global systems. At its centre, the TEAM-ECD model highlights five layers that shape development: the individual child, the family, the community, early childhood services, and broader policy structures. Each layer contributes to children's wellbeing by providing emotional security, stimulation, protection, and adequate nutrition. The framework emphasises that warm, responsive caregiving and safe, nurturing environments are essential for healthy development but recognises that not all families can provide these conditions without support. For this reason, WHO calls for coordinated action across health, education, and social policy to ensure all children have equitable access to high-quality early childhood development services. (World Health Organization, 2007)

Effects of poor nutrition on physical development

Poor nutrition in early childhood affects physical development in three keyways: it can impair growth and lead to stunting, reduce children's energy and stamina, and weaken the immune system (UNICEF, 2024). When children do not receive the nutrients they need, their bodies cannot grow at the expected rate, resulting in chronic undernutrition and reduced height for age. A lack of adequate calories also limits physical strength and energy, making it

harder for children to play, explore and participate in daily activities that support development. Poor nutrition further compromises the immune system, increasing vulnerability to illness and slowing recovery. These effects are most significant in the first 1,000 days of life, when nutrition has the strongest influence on long-term health and development.

(UNICEF, 2024)

Factor and challenges of nutritional development

Factors that influence nutritional development:

Diet quality and diversity, children require nutrient, rich foods early in life.

Maternal and early life nutrition, nutritional status during pregnancy and infancy strongly affects growth, immunity and long-term health.

Health status and disease burden, illnesses such as diarrhoea and infections reduce nutrient absorption and increase nutritional needs, influencing growth outcomes.

Caregiver knowledge and feeding practices, how caregivers feed children, such as timing, frequency and food choices can directly affect nutritional development.

Challenges and barriers to healthy nutritional development

Rising childhood obesity, (Nestle Nutrition Institute, 2023) states that overweight and obesity are increasing worldwide, creating a double burden of malnutrition.

Inequitable access to nutritious foods, many families can't afford or access diverse, nutrient dense foods, limiting children's growth potential.

Inadequate health and nutrition services, limited access to early nutrition programmes, supplementation and health care reduces opportunities for early intervention

Environmental and economic instability, food price fluctuations, conflict and climate related disruptions affect food availability and quality.

(Nestle, Nutrition Institute, 2023)

Implications for practitioners

When practitioners support children that have been affected by poor nutrition, they need to work in a way that reflects national policy expectations for early, equitable and family centred intervention. The National Best Practice Framework for Early Childhood Intervention highlights that practitioners must recognise poor nutrition as a developmental concern and respond using evidence informed, culturally safe approaches that strengthen families

understanding to support their child's health and daily functioning. Policy also emphasises collaboration across health, education and community services, this means that practitioners play a key role in linking families to nutritional support, monitoring how nutrition impacts daily functioning and ensuring that children can meaningfully engage in their learning environments. (University of Melbourne, 2025)

Conclusion

To concluded poor nutrition in early childhood has lasting effects on growth, energy and overall development, this makes early identification and support essential. Practitioners have a responsibility to recognise nutritional concerns and respond in ways that reflect national policy, using evidence informed, family centred and collaborative approaches.

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