

Promoting Emotional and Social Development in Early Years: Applying Bowlby Theory to Shona

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Bowlby's Introduction

This presentation applies Bowlby's Attachment Theory to 3-year-old Shona, who has just started nursery. She shows that separating isn't easy for her; she doesn't speak and finds it hard to join group play. Bowlby's theory is chosen because it puts emotional safety and trusted bonds first – the foundation for confidence, communication, and joining in. It helps us understand how children feel secure in new places (Bowlby, 1969).

Bowlby's Main Concepts

- John Bowlby was a British psychologist who developed Attachment Theory.
- He believed children naturally form a strong emotional bond with their main caregiver.
- This bond helps children feel safe and secure.
- Bowlby believed early attachments can affect a child's emotional and social development later in life.
- His theory is important for understanding how early relationships can influence development.
- In conclusion, Bowlby's theory shows that early relationships are important for a child's development.

Early Attachment Birth – 6 months	Strong Attachment 6 months – 3 years	Growing Independence 3 years +	
What they need	Warm, consistent care. Someone who always responds & keeps them safe.	A safe base – someone they trust. They can go play, then come back for comfort.	Understanding & trust. They know you'll come back, so they feel brave to explore.
When it works	Baby feels safe & loved. Learns the world is kind.	Confident to explore. Upset when you leave, but happy & calm when you return.	Secure & brave. Makes friends. Trusts people. Feels safe to be themselves.
When it doesn't	Anxious, hard to calm. Feels unsafe.	Clingy or pushes you away. Scared to try new things.	Worried, shy, finds it hard to trust others.

Why Bowlby Matters in Early Years

Bowlby says secure bonds come first

They're the foundation of everything.

Children need a trusted person they feel safe with before they can learn or explore.

Feeling safe = confident to try new things, make friends, and learn.

This matches UK early years rules: emotional wellbeing comes first.

It helps all other skills grow.

What we see	Why it happens (Bowlby)	What Shona needs
Upset when carers leave	No secure bond yet. No one she fully trusts as her safe.	Same key person every day – someone she can bond with & rely on.
Doesn't talk much	Doesn't feel safe yet. Confidence is built when she feels secure.	No pressure to speak. Warm, calm chats – she's valued either way.
Won't join group play	Won't explore until she feels safe. Needs a trusted person to return to.	Start with just 1 adult. Add others slowly. Go at her speed.



Nature and Nurture – Bowlby

- **Nature**

- All children are born needing a close, trusted person to feel safe (Bowlby, 1969).
- Feeling upset when apart is natural; it's how children stay safe.
- Some children are more careful & take longer to trust

- **Nurture**

- Same kind, familiar adults help her feel secure (Bowlby, 1988)
- New nursery is building new bonds; this could take time
- Knowing who will be there helps her settle
- Overall, Shona is not refusing to join in; she just hasn't built enough confidence here yet. Once she feels safe, confidence will grow (Bowlby, 1969).

Strategies



Expectations: Asking or telling Shona to speak, join in, or leave quickly stops her feeling safe. Slow, kind support builds secure attachment (Bowlby, 1988).



How it works: All children need a trusted person as their secure base. Once safe, they grow brave and confident (Bowlby, 1969).

Build Secure Base	Build Confidence	Encourage Exploration
Same key person every day	Simple choices "red or blue cup?"	Follow her join her play
Same routine – greetings & goodbyes	Go at her speed, don't push her	Invite, don't push "Shall we help you?"
Always return when you say you will	Praise effort – "You tried so hard!"	Talk to her first, then groups

Critical Evaluation

– Bowlby

- Home–Nursery Partnership
- Always update the parents. Keep routines the same at home and nursery.
- Same care = Shona feels safe and builds trust faster (Bowlby, 1988).

Strengths	Limitations
Shows feeling safe comes first – before learning, speaking, or joining in (Bowlby, 1969).	Doesn't give enough detail for children with extra needs – may need other support too.
Simple to use: one key person + consistent care = secure base.	Not every child bonds the same way – some need more time or different approaches.
Early secure attachment shapes confidence for life.	Focuses mainly on one main bond – children can have several important people.

Conclusion – Bowlby



Shona's anxiety, quietness, and holding back are understandable. She hasn't built a secure attachment here yet (Bowlby, 1969).



Bowlby says: feel safe first → then be brave to learn, speak, and join in (Bowlby, 1988).



With the same trusted person every day, consistent care, and time, Shona will feel safe here. Once she has her secure base, confidence will grow – in her own time.

References

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