

You are going to be a DAD!



What is attachment? How do we
bond? Why is it important?

Dear soon-to-be-dad!

I can't wait to meet you! I am sure you are just as excited as I am, and I thought, while we wait I tell you a bit more about myself.

It is really important to me to bond with both of you and mum. I won't be able to tell you what is wrong and I will want to know I am safe with you; I will rely on both of you. You might say, for mum is a bit easier, we spend about 9 months together before I see you dad, but it doesn't mean we can't have a special thing too. And this special thing is attachment or as it often called, bond.

Did you know?

The father's role in their children's development only started to get more attention in the 1970s. This is why the early attachment theories focused mostly on mothers as they were viewed as the primary caregiver of the child.

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Let's talk about what will happen when I am born. Have you heard about **skin-to-skin contact**? That's what they will do with mum and me in the first hour in my life. Clever people like Potgieter wrote about how important it is and how it influences our relationship with mum. They even say it will form my social and emotional development later. It sounds like a big thing isn't it? Have you thought about trying it too? Don't worry if not, we will have plenty of time to make up for it!



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Did you know?

Skin to skin doesn't have to happen immediately after birth, it can be practised any time, and skin to skin with dad can be a help to improve their bond with baby.

When I talk about **attachment** I mean a secure base that is comfortable and safe so gives me the opportunity to explore the world around me, where I can go back if I am scared for example. The emotional care what you can give me is just as important as food! The type of attachment or the quality of this attachment can predict my future relationship patterns throughout my life. But this is not something that is set in stone in the first couple of hour or days in my life. It will develop as I grow and I will go through different phases. John Bowlby called these:



- ✦ **Pre-attachment phase:** It is about from when I was born till 2 months. In these first months, I will show very little difference in how I respond to you, mum or other people.
- ✦ **Early attachment phase:** This will last from 2 months to 7 months, and I will start to recognize whoever spends the most time with me and this person can comfort me more successfully.
- ✦ **Separation protest:** This phase is from 7-9 months to 2 years. This is when I will be upset if this person leaves the room and I might be scared of strangers.
- ✦ **Goal-corrected phase:** This is from 2 years upwards, I will start to be more independent, and I start to understand that the person's needs, they might go to the loo without me crying. But I can not promise not to follow them from time to time.

Interesting...

Harlow and Zimmerman in 1959 carried out an experiment with baby monkeys. The monkeys had two mother figures. A wire model that was the source of food and a cloth model that did not provide food. Their study proved that attachment is about much more than just basic essentials and nourishment. When the monkeys were frightened, they always returned to the cloth mother when both the wire and the cloth mother were available. It shows that the cloth model provided comfort that is just as important as food. The cloth mother acted as the safe base where from they could explore their environment but return to if they got anxious or scared. Although if the monkeys weren't reunited with their real mother after the first three months, they showed signs of serious psychological damage when placed together with ones who had not been separated from their mother. Research later showed that these effects are reversible, so the so-called critical period is now called a sensitive period.

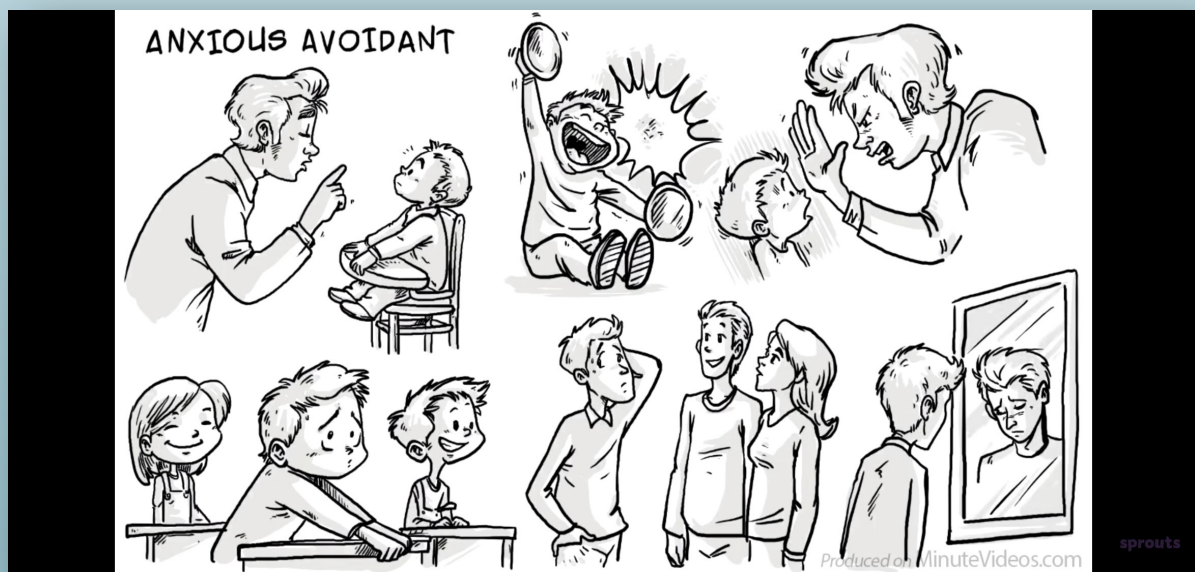


So now we know that not everything is set in stone in the first couple of weeks or months, and if something goes wrong, it is reversible. But up to 3 years of age it still stays a sensitive period. More recent studies actually showed that late adoptees around 3-7 years still reported a good and secure relationship with their adoptive parents. These findings actually made psychologists more focused on the quality and the **type of attachment**.



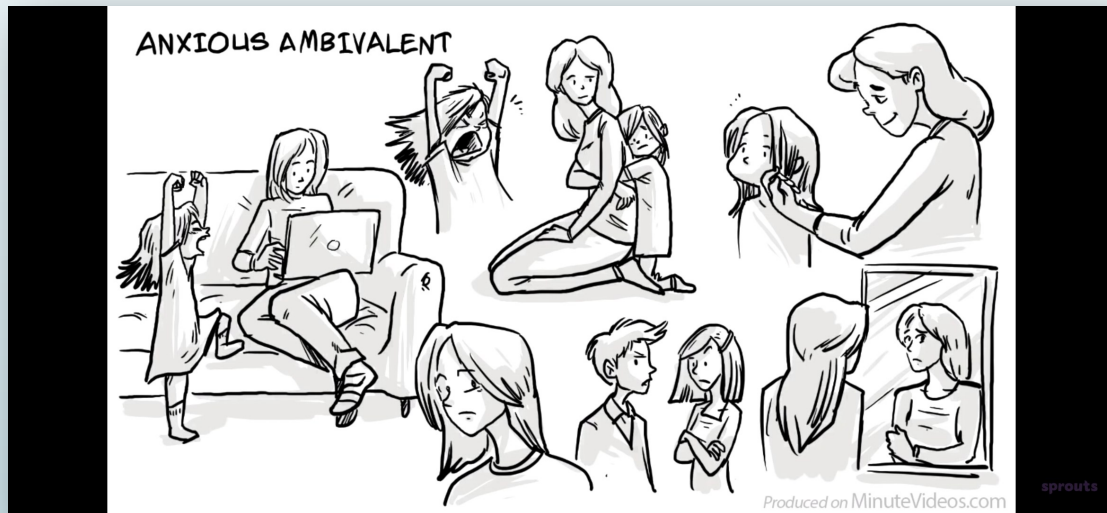
There are **four attachment types**, and I will try my best to explain it is through the **stranger situation** experiment. This experiment is a series of timed episodes where the researcher observes how the child reacts in each scenario. If I would participate in this experiment, the researcher would look at how I react when mom (or my primary caregiver) leaves the room, but more importantly when she comes back. This is what could happen:

Insecure-anxious avoidant type



In this case, I wouldn't maintain contact with mom; I probably would treat her as the stranger in the room. I wouldn't be upset when she left and wouldn't react when she came back. I would avoid showing emotions. As a grown up I will have problems to show my emotions, and I will have a rather negative self image.

Insecure-resistant/ambivalent



If this is my attachment type, I would be really upset when mom left; I would probably cry. I would not let the stranger comfort me, but it would be even hard for mom to do it when he comes back. As grown up I probably will have a less positive self image and people might think I am unpredictable and moody.

Insecure- disorganized



In this case, I would be very confused about her leaving and returning, and I would probably be anxious to go to her. As an adult I will avoid social situations, I will think I am unworthy for love and my self image will be very negative.

Securely attached



If I am securely attached to her, I would ensure she is close to me, and I would be really upset upon her leaving. Although I would be happy to see her again and she would be able to comfort me when she comes back. As an adult I will be able to trust people and have a healthy relationship. My self image will be positive.

How?



Secure attachment doesn't happen overnight. It takes time, and it starts with **taking care of yourself!** Yes! Your well-being is really important for the sake of my well-being. Take some time for yourself, get as much sleep as you can, and ask for help if you need it!

Hold me and cuddle! Physical touch is just as important as food or sleep.

Listen, smile and talk to me! Show me how you feel, look at me, and get to know me so you can respond my cues.



So why all this is so important regarding my adulthood?

As a representation of my relationship with my primary attachment figure I will have an **internal working model**, a model for what relationships look like. If I have a reliable, loving first relationship, I will bring these same qualities to my relationships when I grow up. If I have bad experience with poor treatment in my first relationship it is more likely I will have the same problems later in my life. But it is not only affects my relationships later on, it will affect what kind of parent will I be. This **internal working model** will be a template for all kind of relationships in my future, it carries my memories and early experiences about attachment. Will I be caring? Will I be able to trust people or will I have trouble with that? Will I be comfortable with intimacy or fear it?



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