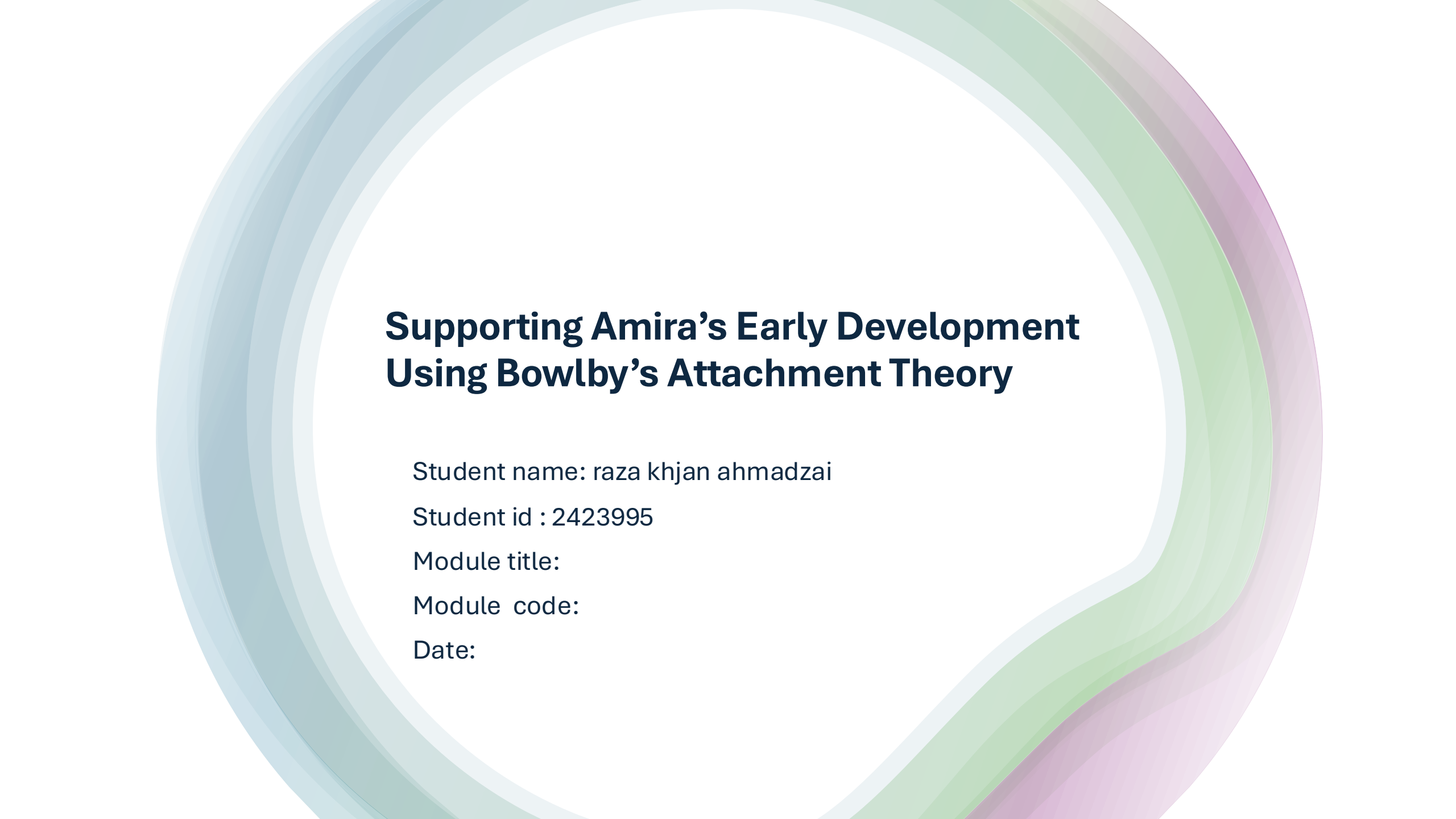




Supporting Amira's Early Development Using Bowlby's Attachment Theory

Student name: raza khjan ahmadzai

Student id : 2423995

Module title:

Module code:

Date:

Scenario: Understanding Amira's Needs

- Amira – 3 years old, recently started attending nursery.
- Shows anxiety when separated from her carers (crying, clinging).
- Limited verbal communication – speaks very few words or stays silent.
- Struggles with group play – prefers to be alone or watches others quietly.



(Bowlby, 1969).

Bowlby's Attachment Theory – Key Concepts

Developed by John Bowlby (1950s) – attachment is an innate biological need.

Infants form a strong emotional bond (attachment) with their primary caregiver.

A secure attachment provides a “safe/secure base” to explore the world.

Separation from caregiver can cause distress → e.g. crying, anxiety.

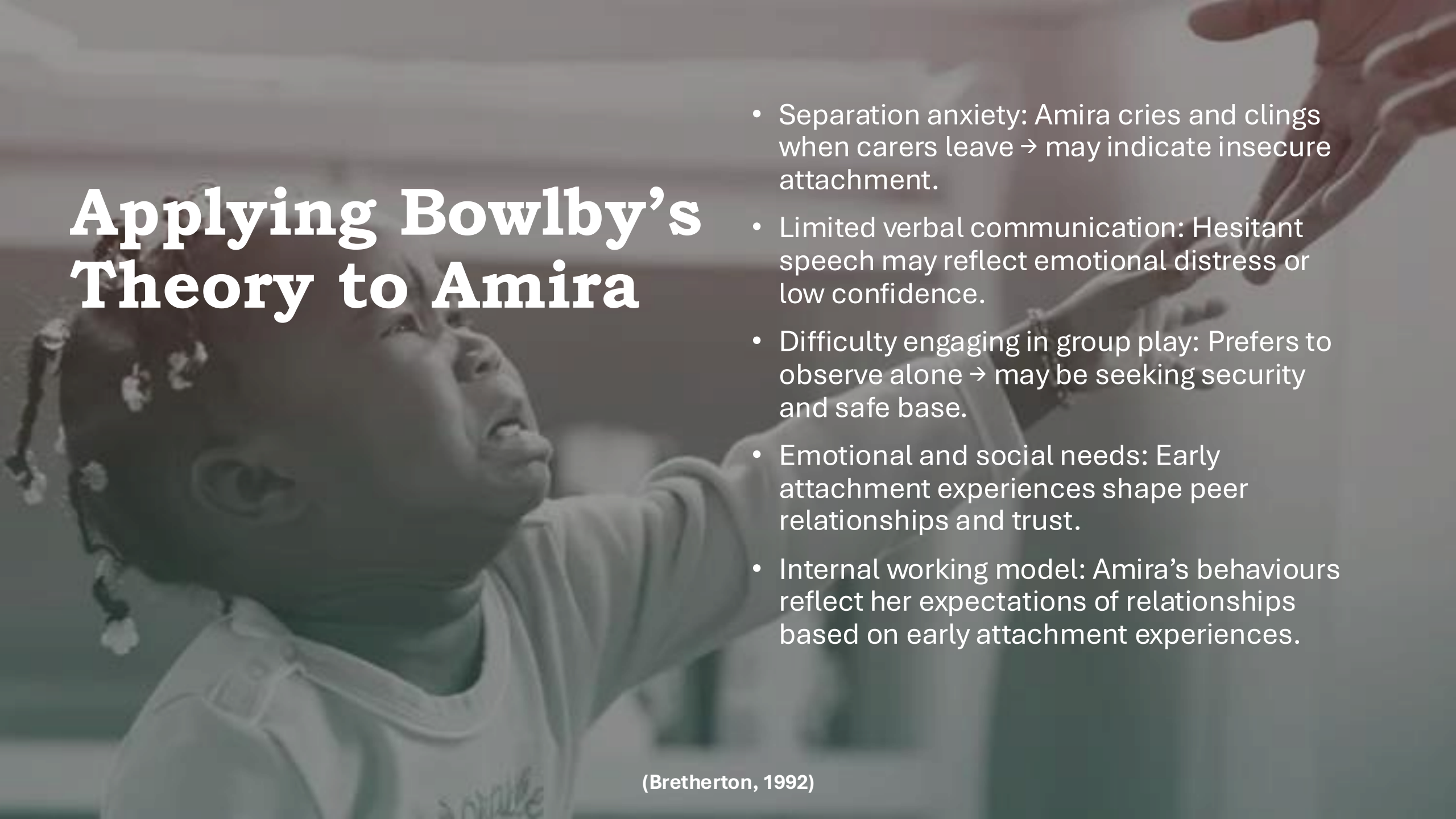
Early attachments shape the Internal Working Model → how the child views themselves, others, and relationships.

Why Bowlby's Theory Matters for Young Children

- Secure attachment supports emotional regulation → children cope better with stress and separation.
- Influences social skills → sharing, taking turns, forming friendships.
- Supports cognitive development → confidence to explore, learn, and problem-solve.
- Guides practitioner approaches → consistency, sensitive responses, nurturing relationships.
- Insecure attachment may lead to behavioural challenges → withdrawal, anxiety, difficulty forming peer relationships.



(Ainsworth et al., 1978).

A young girl with dark skin and braids is looking up at an adult's hand reaching down towards her. The background is blurred, showing other people in a room.

Applying Bowlby's Theory to Amira

- Separation anxiety: Amira cries and clings when carers leave → may indicate insecure attachment.
- Limited verbal communication: Hesitant speech may reflect emotional distress or low confidence.
- Difficulty engaging in group play: Prefers to observe alone → may be seeking security and safe base.
- Emotional and social needs: Early attachment experiences shape peer relationships and trust.
- Internal working model: Amira's behaviours reflect her expectations of relationships based on early attachment experiences.

(Bretherton, 1992)

Biological and Environmental Influences (Nature vs Nurture)

Biological (Nature) Influences:

- Genetic temperament may affect how Amira responds to stress and new environments.
- Brain development in early childhood influences emotion regulation and communication.
- Some children are naturally more sensitive or anxious → affects attachment behaviours.

Environmental (Nurture) Influences:

- Quality of caregiver-child relationship and previous attachment experiences.
- Possible changes in family routine or inconsistent caregiving may affect emotional security.
- New nursery environment → unfamiliar adults, routines, and peers → increases separation anxiety.
- Positive nursery environment can help build new secure attachments



Support Strategies for Amira: Applying Bowlby's Theory

- Assign a Key Person: Consistent nursery adult to greet, comfort, and build trust with Amira (EYFS recommendation).
- Gradual Settling-In Routine: Short initial separations, parents can stay, slowly increasing independence to reduce anxiety.
- Emotionally Responsive Care: Acknowledge feelings (“I know you miss mum”), offer comfort, hugs (if consented), calm tone.
- Predictable Routines: Consistent daily structure helps Amira feel safe and in control.
- Attachment Objects: Allow comfort item from home (e.g., blanket/toy) for security during transitions.
- Encourage Social Play Gently: Begin with 1-to-1 play before small group interaction – reduces overwhelming situations.
- Support Communication: Use simple language, gestures, picture cards to encourage expression of needs and emotions.

Day-to-Day Implementation in Nursery

1. Key Person Routine: Assign Amira a consistent key worker who greets her daily and provides comfort.

2. Gradual Separation & Arrival Routine: Use the same phrases daily (“Mummy will come back after snack time”) to build trust.

3. Comfort & Emotional Support: Provide a calm corner with books, soft toys, and personal comfort objects from home.

4. Consistent Daily Schedule: Use visual timetables (pictures for snack, playtime, outdoor, home time). Predictable structure helps Amira feel secure and reduces anxiety.

5. Supporting Communication: Use simple language, gestures, and picture cards.

6. Social Interaction Support: Start with 1:1 play with a supportive adult → then pair play → small group play. Use shared activities like puzzles, sand play, or drawing.

Strengths of Attachment Theory

- Evidence-Based: Supported by research on maternal deprivation and secure attachment (Ainsworth's Strange Situation).
- Real-World Application: Influenced childcare practices, key person approach in nurseries, foster care, and social work.
- Highlights Emotional Needs: Recognises how early relationships affect emotional, social, and cognitive development.
- Useful for Practitioners: Helps identify attachment-related behaviours like separation anxiety in children (such as Amira).

Limitations of Attachment Theory

- Too Focused on Mother: Early theory suggested attachment is mainly with the mother — criticised for ignoring fathers, extended family, or cultural differences.
- Deterministic: Suggests poor attachment in early years leads to long-term issues — does not fully account for resilience or later positive experiences.
- Cultural Bias: Based largely on Western, middle-class families — not always suitable for collectivist cultures where multiple carers are common.
- Underestimates Social & Economic Factors: Poverty, trauma, disability, and environment are not fully considered in Bowlby's early work.

Conclusion

- Bowlby's Attachment Theory explains how secure relationships are essential for emotional, social, and cognitive development.
- Amira's behaviours (separation anxiety, limited speech, difficulty in play) can be understood through insecure or disrupted attachment.
- Both biological factors (temperament, brain development) and environmental factors (family experiences, new nursery setting) influence her development.
- Attachment-focused strategies—such as the key person approach, consistent routines, emotional reassurance, and gentle social support—can help Amira feel safe and confident.
- While Bowlby's theory is highly valuable in early years and health and social care, it should be used critically, considering culture, family diversity, and resilience.



References

1. Bowlby, J. (1969) *Attachment and Loss: Volume 1 – Attachment*. London: Basic Books.
2. Bowlby, J. (1988) *A Secure Base: Parent-Child Attachment and Healthy Human Development*. London: Routledge.
3. Ainsworth, M., Blehar, M., Waters, E. and Wall, S. (1978) *Patterns of Attachment: A Psychological Study of the Strange Situation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
4. Department for Education (2024) *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)*. London: DfE.
5. Howe, D. (2011) *Attachment Across the Lifecourse: A Brief Introduction*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
6. Bretherton, I. (1992) 'The origins of attachment theory: John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth', *Developmental Psychology*, 28(5), pp. 759–775.