

Secure Attachment Promotes a Positive Emotional Life for Infants and Toddlers

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What is Attachment?

- ▶ Attachment, **an enduring emotional bond to a specific person**, is especially **activated when a child is under stress**.
- ▶ The **biological function of an attachment is to provide protection** for the infant and young child who feels frightened (by a sudden loud noise- dog bark, or alone too long, tired, or getting sick, or in pain, or rebuffed by a peer).
- ▶ The **kind** of attachment formed helps a baby **organize** behaviors in relation to that person. The **threat of losing an attachment figure arouses anxiety and anger**.
- ▶ **Attachment is goal -corrected**. If a baby's cries do not work, baby may try crawling toward attachment figure or hang onto pant leg or do whatever it takes to get near that person (e.g. call out " Potty" when left alone in play pen!).
- ▶ Attachment styles that are formed in the early years **become part of an unconscious way of relating to others**.

Types of Attachment

- **Secure:**

- Baby seeks contact; is easily soothed by you; explores freely when you are near.

- **Avoidant/insecure:**

- Baby does not seek you out; explores even if you are not near. Seems content even if adult leaves room (but measured physiological stress is high!)

- **Ambivalent/resistive/hesitant insecure :**

- Baby **seeks and also rejects contact** (squirms to get down; hits at adult); shadows you.

- **Disorganized/disoriented/insecure:** Baby shows dazed expression or fear; goes to you but may freeze or look away; explores in disorganized fashion. Child may run toward you, then stop and seem unsure.

How is Attachment Measured?

- ▶ Your **keen observation skills** are a wonderful tool to assess emotional well-being or worrisome attachment troubles of an infant or toddler.
- ▶ **Ainsworth's Strange Situation (ASS)** (lasting about 20 minutes) is a laboratory procedure of 8 (~3-minute) episodes for 12-18-month olds in a room with toys and two chairs. Two separations from the attachment figure occur. In the first separation, a stranger is present in the lab room. In the second separation, baby is left alone briefly before the stranger and then the attachment figure returns. Separations are shortened if baby acts very upset. **Reunion behaviors of babies are coded. The ASS is valid for all babies including those enrolled in child care!**
- ▶ **Water's Q Sort** consists of a set of ~100 cards **describing** a child. Trained observers and parents learn the descriptions. After several hours of observations, adults are asked to sort the cards into 9 piles from least to most characteristic of the child. Q-Sorts are used with preschoolers as well as babies.

Signs of Positive Baby Attachment

- Baby protests when left with stranger or left alone.
- Baby is able to give stranger a dazzling smile **IF** safely snuggled in your arms.
- Baby smiles or lifts arms or crawls to you to be picked up when you come back into the room.
- Baby sinks onto and snuggles on your body when held.
- Baby calls, crawls, runs, or clings to you **IF** tired, worried, stressed, and needing reassuring murmurs, hugs, chants, and cuddle time.
- Baby engages in earnest coos and intimate “talks” with you.
- Baby ignores you and crawls away with vigor to explore when attachment needs are low, and you are present right there. Baby then feels free cheerfully to move away to enjoy explorations, adventures, and surprises.

Lifting Arms to Special Person



Molding and snuggling



Turn-taking Talk and Mutual, Loving Gaze

Photo Tim Schoon



Affectionate Touching



Intimate Holding while Feeding



Emotional Development Photo: *Science Daily*, Brigham Young University

**Secure Babies Explore and
Enjoy (rather than fear)
New Amazing Sights**





Why Secure Attachment is Important!

- ▶ Children establish secure attachment when a **caregiver sensitively interprets correctly, and also responds promptly and appropriately to infant signals of distress** (tiredness, fear, hunger, needs for cuddling). The caregiver is not intrusive or over controlling, but **IS** able to figure out baby's needs - to feed, dress, bathe, and care for baby by **tuning into that baby's tempo**.
- ▶ The neuroendocrine-immune network is triggered when a child is under stress. Stress floods a baby's system with the stress chemical **cortisol** (measured by a cheek swab).
- ▶ Early trauma actually changes the structure of the brain so then worried children respond with FREEZE, FLIGHT, or FIGHT behaviors!

Babies Need a 'Refueling' Station

- YOU are the best **Refueling Station** for a tired, upset, “wilting” child (Mahler). Create a “Circle of Security” to reassure and calm baby.
- Babies see-saw between needing attachment comfort and also needing to explore.
- Your special skill is : Attuned loving **sensitivity** to infant signals!
- Provide a special **beacon of security** while baby bravely ventures out to explore.

Securely Attached Babies Compared with Insecurely Attached Babies Are...

- more curious, resilient, self-confident
- more likely to form close friendships
- more able to resolve conflicts with peers
- more often able to show joy & cheerfulness in play
- more likely, during the “terrible –twos”, to comply with adult requests
- more likely to have more varied vocabularies

Securely Attached Children Act Lovingly with Friends



An Internal Working Model (IWM) of Attachment Lies Outside Consciousness

- The main purpose of an IWM “remains the adaptive regulation of negative arousal when feeling insecure” (Bowlby).
- An attachment, whether secure or insecure, is constructed in a relationship with EACH individual caregiver in the baby’s life.

SECURE BABIES:

- Use their special adult as a base to venture out bravely and explore the environment.
- Trust caregivers to meet their needs. They balance harmoniously their needs for comfort and their needs to explore.
- Develop a cognitive model of the self as LOVABLE; they trust their own reactions.
- Are more able to regulate stressful emotions, and to self-soothe.
- Have more feelings of self-efficacy and self-assurance.
- Feel that caregivers are sensitive, flexible, trustworthy, and available.

RESEARCH FINDINGS for Insecurely Attached Children:

- Insecurely attached children have an increased risk for **obesity** by age 4-1/2 (Anderson).
- Avoidant-insecure children are **more likely to become bullies** as preschoolers (Sroufe).
- Very fearful children who are insecure are more likely to become **socially anxious** in adolescence and adulthood.
- Parents who themselves were abused or had very poor relationships with their parents in childhood are more likely to have insecurely attached children (Fujiwara).

Secure Babies Born into High Risk Environments:

- ➔ Securely attached babies—**even** when in high risk environments with
 - ❑ maternal depression,
 - ❑ high financial stress, and
 - ❑ delinquency of parents,were **less likely** to develop high behavior problem trajectories in preschool (Keller 2005).

Abused Neglected Babies

- ➔ **Abused babies experience harsh punitive, controlling and interfering care. Neglected babies experience lack of responsiveness.**
- ➔ **82% of maltreated infants receiving protective services had anxious/disorganized/ disoriented attachment classifications (Cicchetti).**
- ➔ **Avoidant /insecure was the most common classification for neglected babies (Crittendon).**

Attachment Research: Critical Moms

- Maternal criticism of their preschoolers was significantly positively associated with child aggression in grade one for children with initial insecure attachment,
 - but NOT for children with secure infant attachment at 12 months!!
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- Positive nurturing of SECURE Attachment in Infancy is a splendid INSURANCE Policy!

Is Attachment a Function of :

- ▶ **Child gender?** Research shows that males are more vulnerable to deprivation of maternal warmth and sensitivity.
- ▶ **Employed mothers' feelings about their work? Sometimes.**
- ▶ **The parent's own attachment history?** British fathers (with pregnant wives) who revealed difficult relationships with parents in their own childhood had babies assessed as less securely attached to them 12 months after the child's birth. (Steele & Fonagy)
- ▶ **Alcohol abuse?** Among moms who drank little, 22% of babies were insecurely attached vs. 83% of babies (who were insecurely attached at one year) whose moms said they were heavy drinkers during pregnancy.
- ▶ **Maternal Drug abuse?** Newborns who had been exposed during pregnancy to cocaine or PCP were diagnosed at 15 months with anxious/disoriented/ disorganized attachment far more than toddlers in the matched comparison non-drug-abused group. (Beckwith)

What Other Variables are Related to Infant Attachment?

- **Reflectivity?** A home visitor taught about attachment to one group (randomly assigned)of teen high-school -drop- out moms. Babies were flourishing in both control and visited groups **only** when mothers said that they wanted their babies to have a better life than they had had (Brophy-Herb).
- **Adoption ?** For 190 adoptees, maternal **sensitivity** in early childhood predicted secure attachment representations for 190 adoptees at 23 years, thus confirming the importance of **sensitive caregiving** for adopted children too.
- **Maternal depression?** For middle- class depressed moms, the rate of anxious insecure infant attachment is 50%; This rises to 80% insecure attachment for babies of low-income, unipolar depressed moms (Lyons-Ruth)
- **Abuse mother suffered in her own childhood?** In 83 homes for maltreating parents in Japan, mothers' own experience of being maltreated in her childhood was significantly associated with children's attachment problems, independent of current parental child maltreatment . (Fujiwara)

Other Influences on Attachment?

- **Prematurity at Birth?** Middle-class preemies were as likely as full-term babies to be securely attached at 1 year. (Field)
- **Premature sick babies** with respiratory distress syndrome (RDS): 46 % showed resistant insecure attachment (Plunkett).
- **Only 44% of low-income sick, premature babies were securely attached at 12 months** in contrast with 83% of control infants born full-term. (Wille)
- **Poverty?** Poverty, homelessness, food insufficiency increase parental stress -- all can lead to parents providing inconsistent, contradictory signals that are sometimes overly permissive, sometimes over controlling.
- **Child Autism? Severely autistic 2-year-olds with mental retardation were clinically observed more often to show disorganized attachment and less often secure attachment.** (van Ijzendoorn) The children struggled to understand and interpret emotional cues and had elevated heart reactivity.

Insecure Attachment Sequelae: Bullies and Victims (Sroufe & Fleeson)

- When preschoolers were in a class with well-trained teachers, children who had been Avoidantly attached in infancy tended to bully more.
- The teachers were more impatient with those children formerly classified as Avoidant babies. Yet no teacher knew the infancy attachment ratings of the children!
- Ambivalent, resistive babies were more likely to be preschoolers who were bullied; and they even accepted the bullying! Teachers treated them more indulgently as more “babyish”.
- Secure preschoolers played well with those who had been resistively attached. When paired with a “bully“, secure children shrugged and played on their own with toys.



Temperament Styles

- **Temperament is partly genetic.**
 - **There are three major Temperament styles :**
 - **Flexible, easy –going, able to adapt to a change in routine or plans;**
 - **Slow-to-warm-up, shy; withdraws from new or strange people,foods,situations;**
 - **Feisty, impulsive, trigger, intense, very high-energy.**
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Expressions of Temperament





Are Temperament and Attachment related?

Research Findings:

- When a mom has a nurturing helpful partner or other social support person, **and** is tuned in to baby, then even a highly irritable baby (assessed by Brazelton Neonatal scale) was just as likely at one year to be securely attached as an easy going baby (Crockenberg).
- When home visitors in Holland taught 50 low-income moms with highly irritable babies how to **recognize signs when a baby was likely to get intensely upset and how to use special soothing techniques**, such as gentle rocking, swaddling, crooning, then those babies were mostly (68%) securely attached at 12 months compared with 28% of the 50 highly-irritable control babies who had not received the home visitation help (van den Boom).

➤ TEMPERAMENT IS NOT DESTINY!



Later Life Sequelae of Early Attachment

- Students (identified with secure early attachments) had fewer suspicions of or accusations toward romantic partners in college. (Hazan & Shaver)
- Dissociated self states, as in borderline personality, in adulthood, resulted from parenting that was frightening, disruptive, intrusive, and insensitive. In childhood these clients' attachments were disorganized. (Blizzard)



Attachment Troubles can Span Generations

- ▶ The **Adult Attachment Interview** (AAI) (Main) classifies adult states of mind about attachment as : **Secure autonomous; Insecure/dismissing, Insecure preoccupied, or Unresolved** .
- ▶ In a longitudinal study, mothers and grandmothers completed the AAI. Babies were assessed at 12 months in the Strange Situation. Mothers' AAI scores during pregnancy predicted infant classifications in 81% of cases and grandmothers' scores predicted infant classifications in 75% of cases. (Benoit & Parker)
- ▶ When 18-month Q-Sort security scores and 18- year old AAI dismissing and preoccupied states of mind were computed, then toddler Q-Sorts showed that **more secure attachment in infancy was negatively associated with 18-year old states of mind that were dismissing and preoccupied** . (Fraley)



Attachment Troubles May Last into Adulthood

- Baby-mother **attachment** interactions were assessed (for families living in poverty) at 3, 6, 24, and 49 months.
- **Moms** were assessed with Ainsworth's **Sensitivity Scale** during play sessions during the first 6 months.
- **Teachers rated social competence** during kindergarten, grades 1-3, 6, and at age 16. Math, reading comprehension, spelling, and general information were assessed through the school years.
- **Romantic relationship competence** was assessed in interviews at age 23 and 32: - that is, how partners shared; felt close and that they could be themselves; resolved conflicts; reports of any violence.
- **Mother sensitivity during the first 3 years of life had enduring associations with social and academic competence into adulthood at age 32.** (Raby, et al.)



Babies can form Several Loving Attachments

Each loving attachment is unique to that child and that person. Thus, others may help promote a positive, secure attachment for a baby who needs this extra loving experience!

- ▶ Grandparents
- ▶ Fathers
- ▶ Care providers
- ▶ Other caring persons

Grandparent Rejoicing in Newborn



**Fathers are
Precious Attachment Figures (see
“Customs Inspection” of papa’s nose!)**



Flirting with Daddy



Secure Attachment can lead to a Toddler Loving the New Baby!



Caregiver Nurturing a Nurturer!Teaching by Modeling



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