

# Attachment

## An introduction to attachment in children and infants

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## Attachment

### What is it.

- Attachment is not a sudden and magical bond, but rather a slow social unfolding that requires the full participation of both parties!
  - [-zerotothree.org](http://zerotothree.org)
- Secure attachment which is built up by everyday sensitive and appropriately responsive parenting, means a child will be more likely to grow up in a way that will enable them to make the most of their life's opportunities.
  - Balbernie, Robin "The importance of secure attachment for Infant Mental Health" Journal of Health Visiting, April 2013

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# Attachment

## What it is cont.

- Attachment is in place by the time the child is 1 year old
- A child learns from their attachment style:
  - How relationships work
  - Whether the world is safe or not
  - Are they valuable, important, and worthy of love
  - Can their needs be met

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## Why Attachment is important

- The longitudinal research on child development clearly demonstrates that one of the very best predictors for how any child turns out — in terms of happiness, social and emotional development, leadership skills, meaningful relationships, and even academic and career success — is whether they developed security from having at least one person who showed up for them.
- Seigel, Daniel J The Power of showing up: How parental Presence Shapes Who Our Kids Become and How Their Brains Get Wired. Ballantine Books, 2020, pp.5.

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# Why Attachment is important

## Cont.

- Attachment affects brain development in two important ways. First, because the child feels safe and cared for, the brain can use its energy to develop pathways crucial for higher level thinking. Secure attachment is particularly related to the development of the frontal cortex, which is responsible for decision making, judgment, and reasoning (DeBellis & Thomas, 2003; Dozier, et al., 2008).
- Why Attachment Matters." *Children's Services Practice Notes*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2014. <https://practicenotes.org/v19n3/matters.htm>

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## Types of Attachment

- Secure Attachment
- Avoidant Attachment
- Ambivalent Attachment
- Disorganized Attachment

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# Secure Attachment

## What it looks like

- Parents/caregivers quickly respond to their child's needs
- They are consistent in how and when they respond to their child's need
- About 2/3 of all children have a secure bond with their parents or caregivers
- Children can have a secure attachment to one caregiver and an insecure attachment to another caregiver
- Securely attached children can balance the need for comfort and exploration
- When securely attached, children will seek parent for comfort when upset or afraid, and will express a variety of emotions (both positive and negative)

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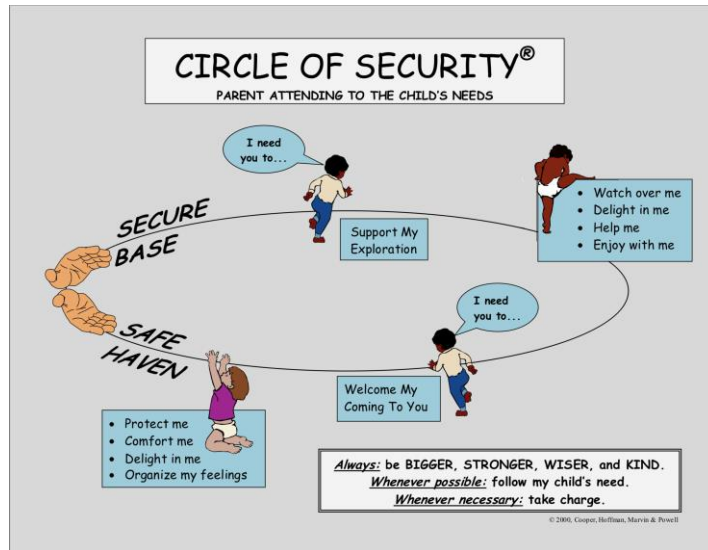
# Good enough parenting

## Supports secure attachments by

- Caregivers being present and responsive
- Caregivers admit mistakes and make amends (repair work)
- Children get the message. "I am safe and you are here to help me."
- Good enough parenting says the if parents are present and responsive 50% of the time and are not abusive the rest of time, children will develop a secure attachment.
  - (Based on study from Lehigh University published in Science Daily, May 8, 2019)

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## Circle of Security/Safe Base



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## How to support secure attachment

- “The capacity of the parent to make accurate meaning of their child’s thoughts, feelings, and actions, as well as to consider their own experiences as a parent.”
  - Julie Ribaud, LMSW, ACSW, IMH-E (“Tough all day and frightened all night” - Oct 15, 2021)
- Caregivers are highly sensitive, responsive, warm, and involved
- Caregivers are able to be curious and see behind the behavior of the child to better respond to their feelings, intentions, and thoughts

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# Insecure Attachments

## Avoidant, Ambivalent, Disorganized

- 1/3 of all children have an insecure attachment
- Remember to look at insecure attachments in the context of relationships — most of the time the child's attachment style is how they adapted to the relationship with their caregiver
- “Once the mother comes to see the child not as her partner in an attuned relationship but as a frustrating, enraging, disconnected stranger, the stage is set for subsequent abuse”
  - Van Der Kolk, Bessel The Body Keeps the Score, Penguin Group, 2014, pp. 120.

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# Insecure Avoidant

## What It looks like

- Caregivers are able to meet the child's physical needs like food, shelter and clothes, although most of the time it is on the caregiver's schedule not the child's
  - Ex. Caregivers will not see that the child is hungry because they are not hungry
- Caregivers struggle to see and meet the child's emotional needs
- When children with avoidant attachment become adults they often struggle to connect with others, struggle to deal with their own feelings

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## Insecure Ambivalent

### What it looks like

- Most of the time caregivers are anxious and focused on their own emotions
- Caregivers are sometimes emotionally present and other times they are not emotionally present based on their own needs
- This type of “intermittent reinforcement” causes a child to have a greater need for attachment, but they don’t know where to get it
- Children who have an ambivalent attachment grow up to have a lot of insecurity, and anxiety

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## Disorganized

### What it looks like

- Caregivers are abusive, extremely neglectful or have dangerous behaviors
  - Child’s view —The person who is supposed to care for and keep me safe, is the one who is the most dangerous
- Child develops a sense of not being safe, people are not safe and the child is helpless
- Children with disorganized attachment, struggle with emotional regulation, social communication, poor academic reasoning, and with violence towards themselves and others
- When a child has a challenging personality, it does not cause disorganized attachment. The cause is the **parent’s response** to the behavior.

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93% of the children in foster care between 1 month and 12 months of age have entered into care with disorganized attachment.

Julie Ribaudó

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## Bonding, What is it?

Simply stated, bonding is the process of forming an attachment. Just as bonding is the term used when gluing one object to another, bonding is using our emotional glue to become connected to another. Bonding, therefore, involves a set of behaviors that will help lead to an emotional connection (attachment).

<https://fosteringandadoption.rip.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/bonding-and-attachment-in-maltreated-children.pdf>

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## Acts of Bonding

### Remember quality is more important than quantity

- Holding, rocking singing, feeding, gazing, kissing and another nurturing behaviors- “all cause specific neurochemical activities in the brain. These neurochemical activities lead to normal organization of brain systems that are responsible for attachment.”
- Face to face interactions, eye contact, physical proximity, and touch- “Scientists believe the most important factor in creating attachment is positive physical contact.”
- <https://fosteringandadoption.rip.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/bonding-and-attachment-in-maltreated-children.pdf>

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## What is Repair

- Caregivers need to provide an environment where the child is:
  - **Safe** — “Parents have two primary jobs when it comes to keeping their kids safe and making them feel safe. The first is to protect them from harm. The second is to avoid becoming the sources of fear and threat.” (Daniel Siegel)
  - **Seen** — They strive to be attuned to their child- attuned is looking underneath the child's behavior to understand what they are feeling and thinking
  - **Soothed** — “When a child is in a state of internal distress, that negative experience can be shifted by an interaction with a caregiver who attunes to and cares for her.” (Daniel Siegel)

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## Rupture with Repair

- Rupture is when the attachment is broken, due to a caregiver not being responsive to the child.
- It happens many times even in a securely attached relationship.
- If there is rupture **with repair** it will **not** impact the attachment relationship.

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## Rupture without Repair

- When rupture happens **without repair**, there is damage to the attachment relationship
- When it happens over and over again it creates an insecure or disorganized attachment

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## Resources

- Why Attachment Matters.” *Children's Services Practice Notes*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2014. <https://practicenotes.org/v19n3/matters.htm>
- Seigel, Daniel J The Power of showing up: How parental Presence Shapes Who Our Kids Become and How Their Brains Get Wired. Ballantine Books, 2020.
- Van Der Kolk, Bessel The Body Keeps the Score, Penguin Group, 2014
- Perry, Bruce, “Bonding and Attachment in Maltreated Children”, The ChildTrauma Academy, <https://fosteringandadoption.rip.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/bonding-and-attachment-in-maltreated-children.pdf>
- National Child Trauma and Stress Network <https://www.nctsn.org>
- The Center on The Developing Child, <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/>

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