

Building Healthy Attachments with Infants & Toddlers

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Learning Objectives

1. Define attachment and describe the importance of attachment relationships in infancy and toddlerhood.
2. Discuss the role of internal working models in child development.
3. Recognize and describe four patterns of attachment.
4. Identify ways to support the formation of secure attachments in home and child care contexts.

Opening Activity:

Reflect on the relationships in your life...

- Which ones would you describe as *Healthy*? *Unhealthy*?
- Characteristics of healthy relationships?
- High-quality, healthy relationships = secure attachments

1. Define attachment.....and describe the importance of attachment relationships in infancy and toddlerhood.

- Affectional or emotional bond between two people
 - (Bowlby, Ainsworth)
 - Emphasis on infant-parent attachment; can study across lifespan
 - Babies are wired for connection! (See Harvard Center on Developing Child videos, available online)
 - Develop over time; reflect caregiving environment
- ***Secure relationships*** (healthy attachments) help infants/toddlers to:
 - build trust, confidence, & sense of safety
 - regulate distress and emotions
 - explore the environment (see Circle of Security)
 - develop strong “brain architecture”

2. Discuss the role of internal working models in child development. (Bowlby)

- Through the experience of *caregiving*, infants develop IWMs of self and others.
 - “Blueprint” analogy
 - IWMs help shape future behavior
 - Positive?
 - Negative?
 - Persist into adulthood, but can be modified

3. Recognize and describe *four* patterns of attachment.

- 1. **Secure (B)**
- **Insecure (A, C, D)**
 - 2. **Ambivalent (Anxious/Resistant) (C)**
 - 3. **Avoidant (A)**
 - 4. **Disorganized (D) (Main & Solomon, 1990)**

What about individual differences?

- Differences in how infants/toddlers cue & respond (READY)
- BUT temperament does not determine attachment.
 - *SENSITIVE CAREGIVING* is key.
- Children with delays/disabilities CAN and DO form secure attachments with sensitive caregivers
- What does sensitive caregiving look like?
 - *(Photos and Video Examples)*

4. Identify ways to support the formation of secure attachments in home and child care contexts.

See Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning, 2011

- **Promote consistent, responsive caregiving** across contexts
- **Observe children** to understand underlying needs
- **Think about culture and diversity** (Zero to Three 2016 conference!)
- **Identify strengths in parenting/caregiving**
- **Provide education, intervention, resources, and referrals**

--Think Prevention!

Circle of Security Model (handout)

- Provides relationship tools to boost security
- Move to organized/secure attachment
- Intensive program
 - Supporting the child's *exploration*
 - Providing a *safe haven* for the child's return
 - *Staying in loving, responsive charge:*
 - ASK: Is the child on the top or bottom of the circle???



Circle of Security
INTERNATIONAL
Early Intervention Program for Parents & Children

What gets in the way of "being with" children? (Circle of Security International)

- Adults' relationship histories
- Stress/life difficulties/prematurity
- Mental illness
- Lack of awareness or understanding of child development
- Discomfort with emotions

The good news?

- Improving sensitive caregiving can help children become more secure even in middle childhood.
- Learning to identify and name our “shark music” can help us, as adults, to provide more consistent, responsive, and sensitive care to children. (Circle of Security)
- Short-term interventions can improve the quality of caregiving and increase awareness. (VIPP; READY)
- Education is powerful in helping to promote secure attachments!

Summary

- 1. Attachment relationships are **affective or emotional bonds** between two people. Secure early attachments promote healthy development across early childhood and into adulthood.
- 2. **Internal working models** develop as a result of the caregiving environment. Positive models of self and others promote healthy relationships.
- 3. Infants and toddlers form **secure or insecure** relationships with the people who care for them. Temperament may impact how attachment behaviors are displayed, but it does not determine attachment security. **SENSITIVE, RESPONSIVE caregiving** is KEY.
- 4. By using a strength-based approach that recognizes **social-contextual influences** (e.g., the contributions of culture and adults' relationship histories), we can support the development of secure, healthy attachment relationships in early childhood.

Resources

- Bowlby, J. (1988). *A Secure Base: Parent-Child Attachment and Healthy Human Development*. Basic Books.
- Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (2011). *Attachment: What Works*. Retrieved from: http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/briefs/wwb_24.pdf
- Circle of Security International www.circleofsecurity.net
- Karen, R. (1998). *Becoming Attached: First Relationships and How They Shape Our Capacity to Love*. Oxford University Press.
- Mesman, et al. (2016). Is the ideal mother a sensitive mother? Beliefs about early childhood parenting in mothers across the globe. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 40, 385-397.

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