

Attachment and Kinship Care

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What is attachment?

- Close emotional bond between parents and children
- Begins in utero
- Affects relationships throughout lifespan
- Changes over lifespan

What is attachment?



We usually think it looks like this

Or this:



But it can just as easily be this:



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Or this:



And it's very nice when it's like this:



Attachment Theory

Bowlby (1969):

“Lasting psychological connectedness between human beings”

Three components:

1. Proximity to caregivers
2. Flight to caregivers for safety in threat
3. Use of caregivers as secure base for exploration

Attachment Theory

- Parent provides safety and security
 - Attachment adaptive to ensure survival
 - Responsive, available parents create a secure child

How is attachment related to trauma?

Attachment disruptions are common in trauma:

- Trauma can disrupt attachment
- Poor attachment can create trauma

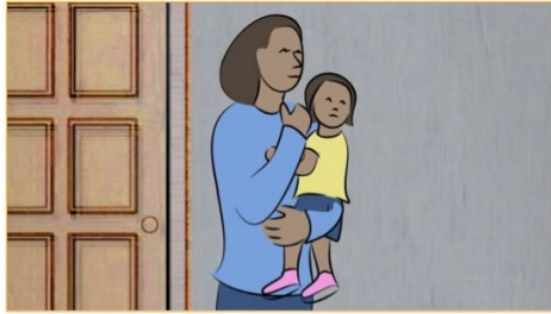
But also:

- Good attachment relationships can prevent trauma

Attachment Theory — The Strange Situation

- Ainsworth (1970) Strange Situation
- Three types of Attachment:
 1. Secure
 2. Insecure Avoidant
 3. Insecure Ambivalent/Resistant
- Main (1986) added a fourth type:
 4. Insecure Disorganized

Four Types of Attachment



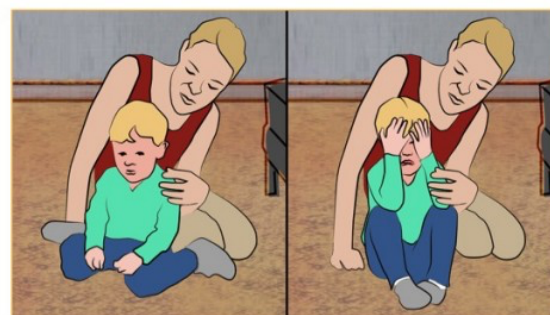
Secure



Insecure-Resistant



Insecure-Avoidant



Disorganized

Secure Attachment

Child —

- Believes attachment figure will meet needs
- Use attachment figure as safe base to explore
- Seek attachment figure in distress
- Experiences caregiver as “available, responsive, and helpful”

Bowlby (1980)

Caregiver —

- Sensitive to child’s signals
- Responds appropriately to child’s needs

Insecure Avoidant Attachment:

Child —

- Not much emotional sharing in play
- Little emotion when caregiver leaves or returns
- Low affect when offered affection
- Treats strangers and caregivers similarly

Insecure Ambivalent:

- Does not use caregiver as secure base for exploration
- Upset when caregiver leaves but slow to warm upon return
- Seeks contact but angrily resists it

Insecure Ambivalent



Disorganized/Disoriented Attachment

- Contradictory behavior patterns
- Risk factor for externalizing behaviors, dissociation, & PTSD
- Paradox: attachment figure both cause of distress and person to turn to in distress

Child Attachment Styles

Understanding Attachment Theory

{ <http://kidscooperate.com> }

Secure



Uses caregiver as a secure base for exploration. Shows appropriate distress when the caregiver leaves and is comforted on return, returning to exploration. May be comforted by the stranger but shows clear preference for the caregiver.

Ambivalent



Does not use the caregiver as a secure base for exploration, protesting before the caregiver leaves. Upset about the caregiver leaving and slow to warm on return. Expressed concern about the caregivers location, seeking contact but resisting angrily when it is achieved. Not easily calmed by stranger. In this relationship, the child always feels anxious because the caregiver's availability is never consistent.

Avoidant



Little emotional sharing in play. few signs of emotion when the caregiver leaves or returns. Showing low affect when offered affection. Treats strangers similarly to caregivers. The child may express lack of attachment and low self esteem by acting out.

Disorganized



Lack of attachment can be expressed by disorganized emotional behavior such as approaching the caregiver but with the back turned.

Ainsworth MD, Blehar M, Waters E, Wall S (1978).
Patterns of Attachment: A Psychological Study of the Strange Situation.
Hillsdale NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Attachment Styles — Adults/Caregivers

- Secure
- Dismissive/Avoidant
- Anxious/Preoccupied
- Fearful/Avoidant

Secure Attachment in Adults

- Positive view of self and relationships
- Greater life satisfaction
- Equally comfortable with intimacy and independence

Dismissive/Avoidant Attachment in Adults

- Positive view of self
- Negative view of other
- Seem invulnerable
- Do not need other people
- Hide feelings
- Deal with rejection by distancing

Anxious/Preoccupied Adults

- Negative view of self
- Positive view of other
- Seek high levels of approval and intimacy
- May become overdependent on attachment figure
- Emotional dysregulation relieved only by attachment figure
- Doubt personal worth

Fearful/Avoidant Adult

- Contradictory feelings
- Want emotional closeness but also afraid of it
- Difficulty with trust
- Seek less intimacy
- Deny feelings
- Uncomfortable expressing affection

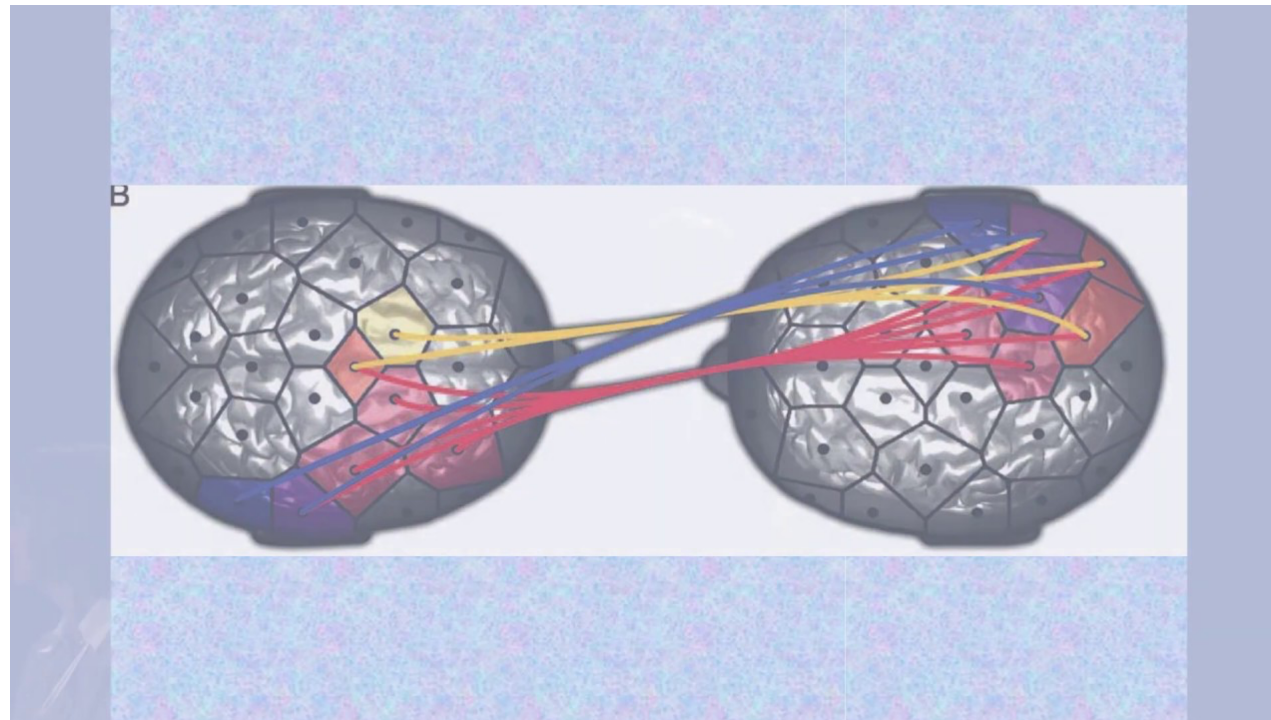
Attachment Theory and Regulation

- Regulation begins in the womb
- Infants are dependent on their caregivers for food, shelter, temperature regulation through appropriate clothing, sensory stimulation
- Physical as well as emotional regulation

Attachment and the Brain

Our emotional brain is shaped by human relationships.

Allan Schore (2019)



Neurobiology of Attachment

- Specialized biological system that supports infant attachment
- Paradoxical when caregiver is source of pain
 - Leads to neurological differences in emotional brain regions

Impact of Complex Trauma on Attachment

- Uncertainty about the reliability and predictability of the world
- Problems with boundaries
- Distrust and suspiciousness
- Social isolation
- Interpersonal difficulties
- Difficulty attuning to other people's emotional states
- Difficulty with perspective taking
- Difficulty enlisting other people as allies

Complex Trauma Fact Sheet 2003

Developmental Trauma

Direct experience or witnessing of multiple or prolonged adverse events with significant disruptions of protective caregiving due to primary caregiver changes, separation, or emotional abuse

Developmental Trauma Disorder Structured Interview for Child (2014)

Children attach to their parents

- Regardless of quality of care
- Even if their parents have hurt them
- Short term: Protective
- Long term: Problematic for future relationships

Using neuroscience to heal attachment issues

- Repair is possible thanks to neuroplasticity
- Knowing where things go wrong gives us a clue to where they can be repaired

Impact of Birth Parent Involvement

Potential Benefits:

- Greater continuity for children
- Emotional ties between parents and children maintained
- Regular, structured contact means greater probability of returning home
 - Especially if contact is with mother

León et al. (2017)

Downside of Birth Parent Involvement

- Stressful for child
- Stressful for caregiver

Making visitation easier:

- Maintain a calendar so kids know when they will visit
- Transitional object to carry during visit
- Help child make gift to take to parent
- Reassure child you will be there when visit is over
- Transport child to and from visit when possible

American Academy of Pediatrics

How to promote good attachment:

- Emphasize safety and security
- Provide stability as best you can
- Balance structure with flexibility
- Be mindful of your own attachment style
 - How do you regulate yourself?
 - How is your style similar to your child's?
 - How is it different?

Rhythms of Engagement

Activities that build attachment:

- Swinging and being swung by adults
- Rocking
- Balancing
- Deep touch pressure —
 heavy blanket or big hug
- Jumping and diving into cushions

Games that build attachment:

- Throwing a ball —
 - Reciprocity
 - Sets a rhythm
 - Gives feeling of being in sync
- Playing dodge ball
- Building a fort
 - Agency — child in charge
 - Protection — child has choice

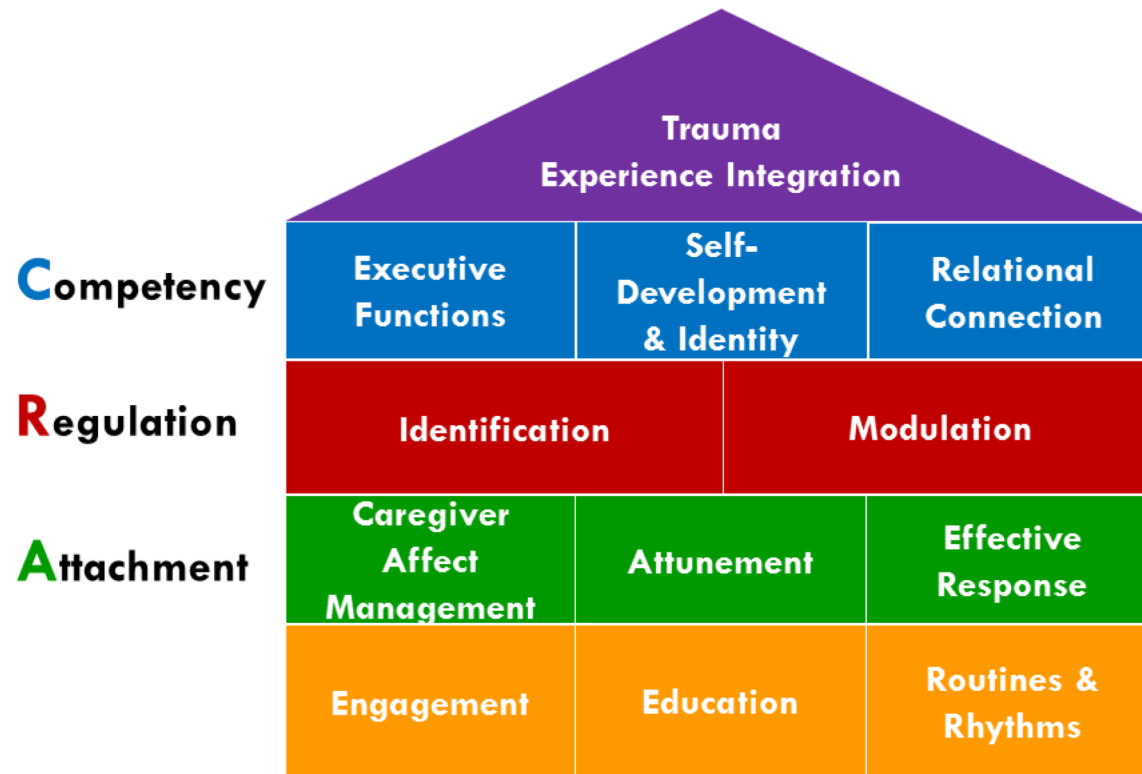
Evidence-based interventions for attachment:

Attachment Regulation and Competency (ARC) Framework

<https://www.nctsn.org/interventions/attachment-self-regulation-and-competence-comprehensive-framework>

Attachment, Regulation, & Competency (ARC)

ARC Framework



Graphic by Jeremy Karpen, 2017; Adapted from: **ARC**, Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2010; Kinniburgh & Blaustein, 2005

Resources

Directions for Youth & Families in Central Ohio uses ARC Framework:
<http://dfyf.org/about/>

Children's Defense Fund — Ohio
cdfohio.org

Circle of Security® focuses on relationships
<http://circleofsecuritynetwork.org/>

Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley has good tip sheets:
greatergood.berkeley.edu

Resources for brain development:

Serve and Return Guide: How Interaction with Children Can Build Better Brains:

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/guide/a-guide-to-serve-and-return-how-your-interaction-with-children-can-build-brains/>

Serve and Return Interactions Key to Babies' Brain Development:

<https://www.aaas.org/news/serve-and-return-interactions-key-babies-brain-development>

More Resources

Guidance for Foster/Kinship Caregivers with suggestions for visitations with birth parents from the American Academy of Pediatrics

https://www.aap.org/en-us/Documents/hfca_guidance_foster_kinship_caregivers.pdf

Fact Sheet “Kinship Caregivers and the Child Welfare System” with guidelines for coordinating with case workers on parent-child visits:

https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/f_kinshi.pdf

Video Resources:

Attachment, Regulation, and Competency (ARC) Approach to Treating Complex Trauma (6:57 mins):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N2NTADxDuhA>

SMART at Home Series on YouTube —

activities engaging rhythm and sensory systems to promote attachment:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wkW3Wm3G4Y4&t=108s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4XmvdmtifUA>

Accentuate the positive!

- Brains biased toward negative
- Calling attention to positive promotes balance

Connection Heals!

Be there —

- Say you're there
- *Show* you're there



Social Networks: It Takes a Village!



Thank you!