Attachment & Early Childhood

Victoria L. Cannon, BPT, MA-HSIC, LCSW
Vcannon@blake.easterseals.com

Training Objectives

- Core Concepts of Attachment
- Primary Functions of Attachment Relationships
- Outcomes of Attachment Relationships

What is Attachment?

- An enduring emotional tie characterized by a tendency to seek and maintain closeness to a specific figure, especially under conditions of stress
- The orientation of the infant to the person(s) who meet their biological, emotional and social needs
- The specific affiliative tie of the infant to the caregiver (thought to become established in the 7-9 month period) is referred to as “attachment.”
Clinical Utility of Attachment Theory

- Guide to understand problems
- Guide for prevention and early intervention
- Guide for therapy

"A weekly interview in which their problems are approached analytically and traced back to childhood has sometimes been remarkably effective. Having once been helped to recognize and recapture the feelings which she herself had as a child and to find that they are accepted, tolerantly and understandingly, a mother will become increasingly sympathetic and tolerant toward the same things in her child."

Bowlby 1940, p22

Core Concepts of Attachment Theory
Core Concepts of Attachment Relationships

- Enduring emotional relationship between a baby and parent
- All infants form attachments
- Attachments vary in quality
- Based in the history of care
- Observed in the organization of behavior
- Transactional between baby and caregiver

“The infant is seen as born into and embedded in an organized relationship matrix from which the self emerges.”

Alan Sroufe, 2014

- There is a relationship that comes around an infant. How those relationships interact with the infant teach the infant about his own internal experience. His behaviors towards the relationship change how they interact/interpret the infant.

Core Features of Attachment

- Secure base behavior
- Haven of safety
- Attachment/exploration balance
- Revealed by patterns of behavior over time
Secure Base Phenomenon

The child uses the attachment figure as a secure base from which to venture out and explore. The child will periodically glance back, exchange a look or smile, and may return for a time for “emotional refueling” before moving away again. Knowing that the attachment figure is available generally allows the child to explore and play at some distance without discomfort.

Haven of Safety

- “As children explore, there will inevitably come a time when they feel the need to seek proximity and closeness and turn to their caregivers as an emotional safe haven.”

Attachment & Exploration Balance

Delight and Explore

The function of exploration is learning about the environment. As a system it is the pull towards novel stimulation and experiences to enhance our development. As the attachment system provides security the exploration system is able to allow freedom for the child to explore their environment. As the attachment system turns off the exploration system turns on allowing the child the freedom to explore their environment.
Functions of Attachment

- **Evolutionary Functions**
  - **Attachment as a Behavioral System**
    - **Attachment Behaviors**
      - Increase Child and Mother Proximity
    - **Aversive Behaviors**
    - **Goal-Corrected**
    - **Biological Function**
      - Provides Predictable Outcomes
        - Protect from predators
        - Feeding
        - Learning about the environment
        - Social Interaction
        - Regulation

- **Evolutionary Function**
  - **Attachment as a Behavioral System**
    - **Relationship to Other Behavioral Systems**
      - Exploratory System
      - Fear System
      - Sociable System
      - Caretaking System
Relational Functions

Attachment as a Relational System

- Not a Measure of the Infant, Relationship between baby and parent
- Degree of Confidence in Caregiver
- Not the child's temperament or emotional base
- Built upon the history of interaction
- Observed in the organization of behavior

Relational Functions

Attachment as a Relational System

- Distinguished from feelings towards an infant
- Emphasize parenting context

Fear and Trauma Function

“Better Safe than Dead”

- Fearful arousal is inevitable
- Reflect efforts to achieve whatever relational safety is possible
- Attachment patterns identify the outcome of repeated moments of fearful arousal and seeking safety
Fear and Trauma Function
“Better Safe than Dead”

- Universal Normative Fears
  - Fear of Pain
  - Fear of Loss
  - Fear of losing love and approval
  - Fear of body damage
  - Fear of being bad/social disapproval
  - Fear of dying

- Universal Normative Safety
  - Being with loved ones
  - Food
  - Shelter
  - Bodily pleasures
  - Beauty
  - Meaning

“Attachment thus refers not just to the quality of the mother-child relationship but to the outcome of these moments of fearful arousal and seeking safety.”

Slade, 2014

Attachment Classification
"The energy that flows through a system ultimately organizes that system."

Harold J. Morowitz, Bio Physiologist

Attachment Classification
Organization vs Disorganization
- Pattern that develops over time
- Ability to maintain or regain equilibrium in face of arousal

Organization is required to manage behaviors, thoughts, feelings

Attachment Classifications
Security vs Insecurity
- Expectation of caregiver availability and patterning of care
- Interruptions in the baby’s “going on being”
- Cumulative risk towards psychopathology
Patterns of Attachment
- Secure
  - “Caregivers are Predictable and Responsive”
- Insecure/Resistant
  - “Caregivers as Inconsistently accessible and responsive”
- Insecure/Avoidant
  - “Caregivers are rejecting and rebuffing”
- Disorganized
  - Caregivers as paradoxical

Ainsworth, 1985

Attachment Development
- Phase I (0-3 months)
  - Undiscriminating Social Responses
    - Orientation without Discrimination
    - Basic Needs
    - No recognition of Caregivers
- Phase II (3-6 months)
  - Preferential Social Responsiveness
    - Recognition of Caregivers
    - Elaboration of Behaviors
    - Initiate interactions

- Phase III (7-24 months)
  - Emergence of Secure Base
    - Consolidated attachment (7-18 mo)
      - Stranger Danger
      - Object Permanence
      - Secure Base Behaviors
      - Stranger Danger
    - Reciprocal Relationships (18-24mo)
      - External Focus and Joining with Others
      - Understanding of Parental Relationship

- Phase IV (24-36 Months)
  - Goal Corrected Partnership
    - Individuation (24-36 mo)
      - Independence vs Continued Connection
      - Behavior/response to relationship
    - Emergent Partnership 36-48 mo
      - Inhibit own Behavior
      - Insert caregivers plans with own plans
      - Operate internally to IWM

- Goal Corrected Partnership (48-60 mo)
  - Shared Plan for Proximity
  - Ability to recognize Attachment figure’s internal world
  - Ability to distinguish between points of view
  - Ability to infer what might control other’s behavior
  - Assess match between two points of view
  - Ability to influence caregivers goals and plans
Social Pattern Development

Development of Preferential Caregiver
- Recognition → Familiarity
- Familiarity → Comfort
- Comfort → Pleasure
- Pleasure → Reliance
- Reliance → Preference

Outcomes of Attachment Relationships

"Whilst especially evident during early childhood, attachment behavior is held to characterize human beings from the cradle to the grave." 

( Bowlby, 1979, p.129)

Outcomes of Attachment Relationships

- Effective dyadic regulation has resulted in effective self-regulation
- Preschoolers with histories of responsive care and secure attachments are judged by teachers and observers to have higher self-esteem, be more self-reliant, and more flexible in the management of impulses and feelings.
- Preschoolers with secure attachment histories recover quickly following negative feelings, able to sustain interactions in the face of conflict and challenge
Outcomes of Attachment

- Adolescents with secure histories have effective emotional regulation and have successful participation in complex peer groups, and capacity for intimacy and successful functioning in mixed-gender groups.
- In reviewing adult attachment patterns, there is a correlation to infant attachment patterns. And there is a predictability of attachment of infants based on mothers' scores on the AAI.
- Parents with history of role reversal in their Adult Attachment Interviews were observed to have role reversal in their parent-child relationships.

IWM

**What you say to your self about your self**

- "We do not believe in ourselves until someone reveals that deep inside us something is valuable, worth listening to, worthy of our trust, sacred to our touch. Once we believe in ourselves we can risk curiosity, wonder, spontaneous delight or any experience that reveals the human spirit."
- e.e. cummings

Inner Working Models
In the working model of the self that anyone builds, a key feature is how acceptable or unacceptable he is in the eyes of his attachment figures

* Alan Sroufe, 2014
* “I am worth being attended to”
* “Others are willing to attend to me”
* I am good enough, I am smart enough and gosh darnit, people like me.

**Inner Working Model**

* Expectations of caregivers responsiveness
* Expectations of self in relationship to others
* Framework for making plans to engage others
* Relationship specific
* Inner construct of “trust” in self and others

**Inner Working Model**

* Trust in Self:
  * I can effect change in my relationships
* Mistrust in Self:
  * I can not effect change in my relationships
* Trust in Others:
  * Others can generally “make it right”
* Mistrust in Others:
  * Others generally “make it wrong”
Attachment

“He didn’t realize that love as powerful as your mother’s for you leaves its own mark. Not a scar, no visible sign…to have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give us some protection forever. It is in your very skin.”

J.K. Rawlings

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References

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