

# TRAUMA INFORMED SOMERSET - EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY SERVICE: ATTACHMENT AND RELATIONSHIPS

DO YOU EVER WONDER WHAT THE RELATIONSHIP IS BETWEEN YOU AND YOUR CHILD?

Attachment is described as an emotional bond between a primary caregiver and an infant.

Bowlby developed attachment theory to describe this relationship and was interested in understanding how this bond develops, and how this can influence the child in their later life experiences.

This relationship and the interactions between the primary caregiver and child, known as attachment, are thought to provide a foundation for future interactions and other behaviours for the child.

## WHAT IS ATTACHMENT?

Bowlby stated that a warm, continuous, intimate relationship between a primary caregiver and their infant, where both receive enjoyment and satisfaction from the relationship, is important for a child's mental health.

Bowlby suggests that this early emotional bond formed between an infant and their caregiver continues to impact the child throughout their life, which is referred to as their internal working model.

Our internal working models provide us with an expectation of social interactions and relationships throughout our lives, based on the relationship with our primary caregiver.

So, if we receive sensitive and responsive care from our primary carer then we are more likely to feel safe and secure in our attachment relationship and will be able to develop similar relationships in the future.

To learn more about attachment theory, here are some links:

- TED Talk (13 minutes) - [LINK](#)
- NSPCC Website - [LINK](#)



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## WHY IS ATTACHMENT IMPORTANT FOR YOUR CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT?

The first few years of a child's life provide the building blocks for future learning, health, and behaviour. The brain connections developed in this time provide the basis for brain development and structure.

The brain continues to change throughout a person's life, and new connections can be formed, therefore, it does not mean that the brain is fixed in the development that happens as an infant.

Therefore, the attachment relationship developed between you and your child plays an important role in your child's brain development.

## HOW DOES ATTACHMENT IMPACT ON YOUR CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT?

One main way attachment plays a role in brain development is through the stress-response system and pleasure reward areas.

When a baby experiences something either internally, such as hunger, or externally, such as a loud noise that is frightening, this registers as distress and alerts the baby's stress-response system. When this distress is relieved then the infant feels pleasure.

Infants are dependent on their primary caregiver for stress and emotional regulation.

Providing your child with attention and acceptance when they are dysregulated, and responding in a way that meets the needs of your child, will help your child to develop the brain connections needed to help them cope with stress and emotional regulation later in life.

These attachment interactions are sometimes referred to as serve and return interactions.

To learn more about the impact of trauma and stress on children's development and relationships:

- UK Trauma Council - Childhood Trauma and the Brain - [LINK](#)
- Public Health Wales - Adverse Childhood Experiences - [LINK](#)



# 6 TIPS FOR SUPPORTING YOUR ATTACHMENT RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR CHILD

01

## **PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR CHILD'S 'SERVES' AND RETURN THEM**

Notice what your child is focused on and respond.

Don't worry, you don't need to do this constantly.

Tune in at small opportunities throughout the day.

02

## **TAKE TURNS WITH YOUR INTERACTIONS**

Whenever you return your infant's serve with an interaction, give them time to respond.

This can help the development of turn-taking and communication skills.

03

## **PROVIDE A RANGE OF RELATIONAL EXPERIENCES FOR YOUR CHILD**

Sensory, motor, physical, cognitive, emotional, and social experiences all help to support the brain development of your child. This can be through any number of experiences such as gentle rocking, skin contact, singing songs, joyful shared moments.

04

## **RESPONDING TO YOUR CHILD'S NEEDS**

The most important thing for developing a secure attachment is being attuned to your child's needs and responding appropriately and sensitively. This helps your child learn about their own needs and how their needs can be met.

05

## **USE OF EMOTIONAL LITERACY**

Using words when responding to your infant's needs, such as naming how they are feeling e.g., 'you seem sad right now', and validating their feelings e.g., 'I would feel sad too if I was hungry', helps them develop their emotional literacy

06

## **BE AWARE OF YOUR OWN EMOTIONS AND FIND WAYS TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF AND SELF-REGULATE**

Being able to notice our own feelings and regulate our emotions has been shown to be important for empathy and developing affectionate relationships.

