# Attachment Styles

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The attachment styles theory is based on the idea that infants need to form bonds with a caregiver, that the connection is an innate human need. At its core, it is an emotional bond between an infant and their caregiver based on trust and an exchange of comfort, care and pleasure. If an infant’s caregiver is unresponsive to the infant’s needs or is abusive, the infant is unable to trust the caregiver and will be unable to have a healthy attachment style.
Rudolph Schaffer and Peggy Emerson did a study that found multiple stages attachment style development. These stages are typical, but the timing and specific reactions are general and not exact.

* Pre-attachment stage (birth –3 months): Infants show no preference in caregivers or any adults, they simply cry to get attention and have needs met by whomever.
* Indiscriminate attachment (6 weeks –7 months) -child starts to prefer primary and secondary caregivers, has more positive reactions to them
* Discriminate attachment (7 – 11 months) -child has a strong attachment and preference for one person. This is when separation anxiety and stranger anxiety are introduced.
* Multiple attachments (after 9 months) -child can form emotional bonds with other caregivers aside from the primary caregiver.

Mary Ainsworth conducted an experiment called the “strange situation study”. From this study, Ainsworth concluded that there are four attachment styles that a child can exhibit.

* Ambivalent/anxious attachment: Child becomes very distressed when their caregiver leaves their presence, and not comforted when the caregiver returns. They are extremely suspicious of strangers. This reaction is most likely due to poor caregiver availability, so the child is unable to consistently rely on the caregiver. This style is uncommon, only 7 –15% of children exhibit it.
* Avoidant-dismissive attachment: Child avoids caregivers, especially after being separated, and has no preference between a stranger and their caregiver. This most likely develops when their caregivers are abusive or neglectful.
* Disorganized attachment: Child shows a mixture of behavior, from being incredibly needy and clingy to avoiding or resisting caregivers. May confused by the presence of their caregiver. This most likely develops due to inconsistency in caregivers, causing a mixture of comfort and fear.
* Secure attachment: Child is distressed when separated from caregiver, but joyful when reunited and quick to calm down. This child knows that the caregiver will return and is anxious but not completely overwhelmed with grief. Child will turn to caregivers when in need of comfort. Secure attachment develops when caregivers respond to the child’s needs and playfully interact with the child. This is the most common style.

Ainsworth’s study:

Internal Work Models –IWM
The internal working model of attachment refers to the development of mental representations, especially regarding self-worth and others’ perception. IWM develops early on in life, but is not studied in infants, and is the basis of attachment styles theory. Attachment style reflects an individual's IWM, how they view themselves based on their relationships.
Components that make up IWM are:

* Memories of attachment experiences –schemas developed that interpret interactions
* Beliefs and expectations about self and others
* Attachment-related goals and needs –an individual’s close relationships dynamics and sense of security
* Relationship behavioral strategies

IWM influences many aspects of life, such as social cognition, mental health, relationships, and emotional regulation. IWMs tend to be stable but can change with new and unfamiliar situations. IWM develops in complexity with cognitive growth and social experiences.

##### History of attachment theory

British psychologist John Bowlby was interested in studying the reasons why children get anxious and distressed when they are separated from their caregivers. From his research, he came up with attachment styles, describing the theory as studying the "lasting psychological connectedness between human beings.”.
Bowlby suggests that attachment is evolutionary, if a child is emotionally attached to their caregivers, they will be more likely to receive care that will help them survive. Behaviorists proposed that attachment is learned by children associating their caregivers with food, but Bowlby found that the relationship remained even without the involvement of food.
Research has been done to find the long-lasting impact of attachment styles and has found that secure attachment may have positive effects on life such as altruism and positive self-esteem, while unhealthy attachment can be associated with behavioral and social disorders.

##### How attachment theory applies to education

“Child attachment security is an important factor to consider when studying school readiness” (Cassidy, Jones, Shaver, 2013

##### Sources used

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