

Parenting Revolution

Toddler Edition

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ACTIVITY SHEET



Attachment simply refers to the quality of the relationship between a child and their caregiver. If a child has a healthy attachment, the child feels confident that their caregivers will respond to their needs. This, in turn, helps them to feel safe and secure and gives them the confidence to explore the world around them. The type of attachment that your toddler forms with you will set the tone for all of your child's future relationships. Children who form secure attachments with their parents are more likely to have healthy relationships as adults. Additionally, parent-child attachments influence your child's social, emotional and mental development. Forming a secure attachment is not about being the perfect parent, it's simply being a loving parent. This session focuses on how to form and maintain healthy and secure attachments.



PROGRAM DESIGN AND OBJECTIVES SUMMARY

This session is designed to help you:

- (a)** understand the most important aspects of parenting
- (b)** learn ways to establish a health bond with your toddler
- (c)** reconcile, and where required, repair and restore, attachment.

Parenting Styles

Mums and dads typically adopt one of four distinct styles of parenting: Authoritarian, Authoritative, and Permissive, Uninvolved. These parenting styles lie on a spectrum, ranging from very strict and controlling, to being very loose and boundary-less. The parenting style which leads to the most secure attachment in early children is 'Authoritative', which involves setting and maintaining rules and boundaries, whilst also being sensitive to toddler's emotional needs.

AUTHORITARIAN

Parents prioritise obedience and correction over child's emotional needs. Parents are typically overly strict and punishment oriented.

Parents prioritise having a positive relationship yet maintain high expectations. Parents set and enforce healthy boundaries and encourage self-discipline.

AUTHORITATIVE

PERMISSIVE

Parents prioritise 'befriending' over 'parenting' their child. Parents do not enforce boundaries, adopting the attitude "kids will be kids".

Parents prioritise themselves. Beyond basic physical needs (clothing, food, shelter), parents do not typically attend to emotional needs.

UNINVOLVED



Which style most accurately reflects your parenting? ✓

Authoritarian

Authoritative

Permissive

Uninvolved

Which style reflects your own up bringing; what was your parent's dominant style? ✓

Authoritarian

Authoritative

Permissive

Uninvolved

Emotional Needs

In addition to basic physical needs (food, shelter, physical safety), all children have a number of core emotional needs – essential for safety and security. When emotional needs are met, children not only develop a secure attachment with their parents, but they're also more likely to develop a healthy sense of self (i.e. positive identity, esteem and confidence).

Consider the following core emotional needs during the toddler years:



If one or more of these emotional needs are consistently unfulfilled, the corresponding impact on emotional development, mental health and future relationship dynamics can be detrimental.

WARNING:
THE MOST COMMON CAUSE OF UNFULFILLED NEEDS IN CHILDREN INCLUDE NEGLECT, ABANDONMENT, REJECTION, ABUSE, TRAUMA, AND A COMPLETE LACK OF LIMITS.

SNAPSHOT Assessment

	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
LOVE AND AFFECTION ✓				
I make a point of verbally communicating love and adoration to my child				
I am intentional about physically hugging and cuddling my child				
My child seeks out my affection (e.g. climbing up on the sofa to snuggle)				
FREEDOM TO EXPRESS ✓				
When my child has a concern, they come and tell me about it				
I respond with interest when my child comes to tell or show me things				
When my child is hurt or upset, I actively take the time to listen				
PLAY AND DELIGHT ✓				
I intentionally sit and play with my child activities of their choice				
Playful interactions with my child result in giggles and laughter				
My child and I take delight in doing craft, reading or playing together				
LIMITS AND BOUNDARIES ✓				
I limit how long my child uses screens and regulate what they watch/play				
I grant my child permission to explore within age appropriate boundaries				
I limit how many candies/lollies my child may consume (even at parties)				

BASED ON THE ABOVE SNAPSHOT ASSESSMENT:

Q. What aspects of your child's 'attachment-needs' may require greater intentionality?

Mary Ainsworth (1913-1999)



In 1985, developmental Psychologist Mary Ainsworth established an assessment procedure that ultimately helped identify three major attachment styles between a parent and their children. These include (a) secure attachment, (b) anxious-ambivalent attachment, and (c) avoidant-insecure attachment. Subsequent research went on to identify a fourth attachment style known as (d) disorganized-insecure attachment.

**HEALTHY ATTACHMENT
IN THE FORMATIVE
YEARS OF A CHILD'S LIFE,
IS THE FOUNDATIONAL
GLUE THAT BINDS, BONDS
AND BUILDS. WITHOUT
IT, THE STRUCTURE OF
A CHILD'S LIFE, CAN
LITERALLY FALL APART.**

Attachment Style

SECURE ATTACHMENT

Your child is likely to become mildly distressed when separated from you, but quickly reverts to being positive and happy when you return. A secure child will explore their environment, but regularly come back to their parent as a safe base.



ANXIOUS-AMBIVALENT

Your child is likely to become distressed when separated from you. When you return, they continue to feel distressed and may even push you away. Anxious-ambivalent children will also be quite anxious and fearful of strangers.

AVOIDANT-INSECURE

Your child is likely to show little or no distress if you leave, and ignores, avoids or is reluctant to draw close when you return.

DISORGANISED-INSECURE

Your child is likely to have poor attachment with you; they may be highly emotional, unpredictable, and are unable to be comforted by you.

YOUR TODDLER'S BRAIN IS STILL UNDER CONSTRUCTION, BUT EXPOSURE TO PARENTAL NURTURE, PHYSICAL AFFECTION, TALKING, LAUGHING AND PLAYING, ALL HELPS ESTABLISH A SECURE FOUNDATION UPON WHICH OTHER ASPECTS OF YOUR CHILD'S LIFE WILL BE BUILT.



Which style of attachment does your child have with you? ✓

Secure
Attachment

Anxious
Ambivalent

Avoidant
Insecure

Disorganised
Insecure

- Q. All parents have the potential to improve and create even more secure attachments. In what ways could you modify your parenting style or better attend to your child's core emotional needs so as to further strengthen your child's attachment with you?



Reconcile your past to get on with your future

Were you raised in a stable, loving, secure home where you were able to develop healthy attachments with one or both of your parents? Or did your parents fail to meet your core emotional needs and as such, resulted in the formation of insecure attachments? You can't choose, control or change your family of origin (or the environment in which you were raised). However, you can control how you attend to your own children's core emotional needs. Research shows that people who are able to face and make sense of past hurts are more likely to go on to have successful, secure bonds with their spouse and children. Here are some steps which may help you to reconcile your past so as to get on with your future:

- Recognise what kind of attachment style you had with your parent(s), and what kind of parenting style they displayed.
- Try to feel a sense of compassion for that younger version of yourself. Remind yourself that you were just a child and therefore not to blame for the way your parent's treated you.
- Try to feel a sense of compassion for your parents. Is there a possible explanation behind their parenting style (e.g. their own upbringing, trauma, mental illness)? You are not excusing their behaviour, but rather finding a sense of understanding and empathy.
- If you feel like you are unable to heal from your past hurts, or that your past is having a negative impact on your parenting, seek professional assistance. Talking to a Clinical Psychologist will help you to gain a healthier perspective on your past and present, as well as developing strategies to help you manage emotional triggers.

Become Your Child's SAFE BASE

An important component of a secure attachment is that your child feels safe enough to explore their environment. However, your child also needs you to be their safe place to return to. This can look like letting go of control and allowing them to explore (when it's safe to do so). Other times, it means enjoying a little exploration time together, helping them when they need.



Consider the following 'safe-base' questions:

Q. During times when the world feels too big and scary for your child, what could you practically do to be your child's source of comfort and security?

Q. Because your toddler is still figuring out how to express and process their emotions, at times their emotions may become 'too big' for them to handle or process on their own (resulting in avoidance, refusal or meltdown style behaviours). What can you practically do to communicate consideration, compassion and care?

ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS; MAKING A HEART CONNECTION IS 1000 TIMES MORE POWERFUL THAN MAKING A POINT (GIVING ADVICE OR CORRECTION). WHEN THE WORLD FEELS TOO BIG AND SCARY, AND YOUR TODDLER BECOMES UNABLE TO ORGANISE THEIR FEELINGS...

**OPEN YOUR ARMS
before you open
your mouth.**