

INFANT ATTACHMENT CATEGORIES



Pathways to
Permanence 2

Parenting
Children
WHO HAVE
Experienced
Trauma
AND LOSS

Session 5
Creating
Positive
Attachments
Part 2

Parent's
Toolbox

SECURE

Secure attachment develops when a caregiver consistently and reliably provides adequate care to a child. A child who is securely attached will seek comfort from his/her caregiver and prefers to be with the caregiver rather than a stranger. The securely attached child will protest being separated from the caregiver, but is consolable after separation and able to adjust to the stranger and strange (unfamiliar) situation. The child will quickly return to a calm state upon reunion with their parent, and be able to reengage in exploratory play behavior.

AMBIVALENT (INSECURE)

Ambivalent attachment develops when a caregiver goes back and forth between attentive and preoccupied caregiving. A child with an ambivalent attachment pattern will seek their caregiver's attention through fussy, clingy behavior only to turn away and spurn the parent when he/she tries to attend to the child. The child will cling to the parent in the strange situation, exploring only in a very limited manner. The child shows strong and prolonged protest upon separation from the caregiver, and is not consoled by the stranger. The child also has a difficult time returning to a calm state upon reunion with the parent, showing prolonged signs of distressed/clingy behavior. The child does not easily reengage in exploratory play.

AVOIDANT (INSECURE)

Avoidant attachment develops when a caregiver is repeatedly neglectful and dismissive of the child's needs. A child with an avoidant attachment pattern may appear overly independent and autonomous. The child does not seem to need or use the parent as a secure base and shows few overt signs of distress when separated from the parent. The child accepts the stranger and appears to show no preference for the parent over the stranger. Upon reunion with the parent, the child avoids the parent and maintains emotional distance. The child may avoid eye contact and appear detached.

DISORGANIZED (INSECURE)

This category was added by later research, and describes children who did not fall into the above categories. Disorganized attachment occurs when the caregiver is repeatedly the source of both comfort and fear for the child. Most children with this attachment pattern come from abusive homes. The child shows a lack of consistent behavioral responses in the strange situation, displaying a diverse array of feelings, such as frozen affect, defensiveness, and confusion. The child with disorganized attachment may at times be close to the parent and distant at others, and may try to control the parent through aggressive and/or caregiving behaviors. The child has a strong, prolonged reaction to separation, responding in traumatized and distorted ways. This category is used for more a more severe degree of impaired attachment.

References

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