



Erasmus + VET Strategic Partnership

IENE 8 - Empowering migrant and refugee families with parenting skills

Bite sized Learning Tool no. 4.1.

SECURE ATTACHMENT

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TITLE: 1.4. : SECURE ATTACHMENT (FOR PARENTS OF 0-24 MONTHS CHILDREN)

This bite-size learning tool analyses how attachment bond is crucial to the infant's mental, physical, social, and emotional development. It will explain why secure attachment is so important and identify the cultural influences on attachment behaviours of refugees.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To identify the attachment styles
2. To define secure attachment
3. To realise the importance of secure attachment
4. To discuss what adults can do to be securely attached to their children
5. To be aware of the importance of promoting secure attachment in immigrant infants taking into consideration their cultural values.

SECURE ATTACHMENT

The emotional connection between an infant and their parent formed by nonverbal communication (attachment bond) is crucial to the infant's mental, physical, social, and emotional development. The type of attachment babies develop depends on their daily interactions with their parents or primary caregiver and ranges from the secure attachment to the insecure.

Four attachment styles have been identified:

1. **Secure Attachment:** It is characterized by a mutual sense of comfort, understanding, secure, care, and concern. Children who are securely attached may be comforted to some extent by other people in the absence of their parents, but they prefer their parents. They accept separation from their parents, knowing that they will be back soon. Such children seek comfort from their parents when frightened.
2. **Ambivalent Attachment:** In this case, children are cautious with strangers. They're distressed when their parents leave, without feeling comfort upon their return
3. **Avoidant Attachment:** Children don't show any preference for parents over strangers and they may even avoid them. They don't feel comfort from their parents.
4. **Disordered Attachment:** Children show a mix of avoidant and resistant behaviours and they are usually dazed, apprehensive, or confused (Faubion 2019).

Why secure attachment is so important?

Secure attachment makes children feel safe that leads to an eagerness to learn, healthy self-awareness, trust, and empathy. It also makes them less disruptive, less aggressive, and more mature than children with one of the rest 3 attachment styles. Children who are securely attached tend to become adults who have trusting, intimate and long-term relationships. They are also expected to have high self-esteem, to seek out social support, and to express their feelings (Gans 2017).

On the other hand, those with ambivalent or avoidant attachment style tend to be reluctant to form close relationships, avoid intimacy, invest little of themselves in romantic relationships, and have difficulty in sharing their feelings with others. Insecure attachment at infancy may act as a risk or vulnerability factor in later development. Finally, according to the American Psychology Association, the insecure attachment may also trigger health problems (Faubion 2019).

What parents could do and when?

While secure attachment can easily be established during infancy, there is never too late to make a child feel understood and secure. In fact, by developing parents' wordless communication skills a nonverbal emotional exchange between parents and their children will start and consequently, the secure attachment process may occur. Parents should be encouraged to play more with their children and to react more quickly to their children's needs.

Cultural influences on attachment behaviors

Parents and infants in all cultures engage in behaviors related to secure attachment, but universality is limited. There is doubt whether the attachment theory is reflected consistently in all cultures, as there is no adequate research across all cultures. Individualistic countries that support independence such as Germany have been found to have high levels of anxious avoidant attachment, whereas countries that are more culturally close (collectivist), such as Japan, had high levels of ambivalent resistant attachment (McLeod 2014).

Additionally, there seem to be behavioral differences among groups of infants of different cultures who are securely attached (e.g. maternal sensitivity, physical or eye contact) and this may be due to cultural differences. Thus, before promoting any care-giving practice related to parenting, professionals should ensure that it fits parents' beliefs and values (McKenna 2009). The attachment theory itself suggests

interalia that the strange situation is not valid in every culture and that sensitive caregiving can differ in different contexts. Moreover, according to the attachment theory attachment relationships may not be a priority when circumstances do not allow caregivers to encourage and maintain secure infant attachment in some contexts (Mc Kenna 2009).

It is very important to keep all these elements in mind when caring for immigrants parents. One of the IENE 8 aims is to help health professionals and volunteers realize how important is to encourage immigrant or refugee parents to develop wordless communication skills and to be more responsive to their children's needs.

KEY POINTS

1. The type of attachment babies develop depends on their daily interactions with their parents and ranges from the secure attachment to the insecure
2. Secure attachment makes children feel safe that leads to an eagerness to learn, healthy self-awareness, trust, and empathy
3. By developing parents' wordless communication skills a nonverbal emotional exchange between parents and their children will start and consequently, the secure attachment process may occur
4. There are behavioral differences among groups of infants of different cultures who are securely attached and this may be due to cultural differences

ACTIVITY

1. Define Secure Attachment
2. Why does Secure Attachment matter in infant's wellbeing?
3. How can parents establish secure attachment after infancy?

REFLECTION ON ONE ISSUE FROM THIS BITESIZED TOOL

Use this space to write down your answers to the questions of the above activities.

SELF ASSESSMENT

Think of some activities with which immigrant parents can invest in being securely attached to their children, taking into consideration their cultural values.

REFERENCES

Gans S (2017). The Different Types of Attachment Styles <https://www.verywellmind.com/attachment-styles-2795344>

Faubion D (2019). What Is Secure Attachment? Psychology, Definition, And Applications. <https://www.betterhelp.com/advice/psychologists/what-is-secure-attachment-psychology-definition-and-applications/>

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McLeod SA. (2014). Cultural differences in attachment, available at <https://www.simplypsychology.org/culture-attachment.html>

Segal J, Glenn M, Robinson L. What is Secure Attachment and Bonding? <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/parenting-family/what-is-secure-attachment-and-bonding.htm>

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS IN ACTIVITY SECTION:

A/A	ANSWER
1	The emotional connection between an infant and their parent which is characterized by a mutual sense of comfort, understanding, secure, care, and concern.
2	Secure attachment makes children feel safe that leads to an eagerness to learn, healthy self-awareness, trust, and empathy. It also makes them less disruptive, less aggressive, and more mature. They are also expected to have high self-esteem, to seek out social support, and to express their feelings.
3	Although secure attachment can easily be established during infancy, by developing parents' wordless communication skills a nonverbal emotional exchange between parents and their children the secure attachment process may occur. Parents should be encouraged to play more with their children and to react more quickly to their children's needs.

ANSWER FOR SELF ASSESSMENT ACTIVITY:

Cultural values affect the way parents raise their children and the attachment that will be established. Parents' cultural values and beliefs are communicated to their children both verbally and not verbally through daily interactions. For example every night before sleep, parents narrate fairy tales including important parts of their countries culture, or listen to traditional music, or play by providing representations from children's home cultures during the day. Spending time with their children for such practices is important in order to form children's cultural identity and to establish a secure attachment with their children. Professionals working with immigrant or refugee parents have to encourage immigrant or refugee parents to spend time with their children taking into consideration their own cultural values.