

Bowlby Attachment Theory ^[1]

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The Emotional Bond

When a person is emotionally bonded with another person, attachment starts. However, the things that occur with the presence of an attachment are really difficult to understand, and this is the reason why attachment theorists emerged.

Perhaps the most prominent of this group of theorists, John Bowlby was the first psychologist who started an extensive study on attachment. According to Bowlby's Attachment Theory, attachment is a psychological connectedness that occurs between humans and lasts for a long period of time. To Bowlby, attachment is what keeps a baby connected to his mother, considering the needs of the child that can only be satisfied by his parent.

Characteristics of Attachment

There are four basic characteristics that basically give us a clear view of what attachment really is. They include a safe haven, a secure base, proximity maintenance and separation distress. These four attributes are very evident in the relationship between a child and his caregiver.

1. Safe Haven

Ideally, the child can rely on his caregiver for comfort at times whenever he feels threatened, frightened or in danger. For example, if a child is given a toy that he doesn't like, he'd cry and his mother would remove the toy and hug the child so he would stop crying.

2. Secure Base

Here, the caregiver gives a good and reliable foundation to the child as he goes on learning and sorting out things by himself. For example, a child would ask questions to his mother about why his dad got sick and can't play with him at the moment.

3. Proximity Maintenance

This means that the child aims to explore the world but still tries to stay close to his care giver. For example, a teenager discusses peer problems with his mother.

4. Separation Distress

This means that the child becomes unhappy and sorrowful when he becomes separated from his caregiver. For example, an infant cries loudly when his mother leaves for work.

Attachment Styles

Aside from Bowlby, other theorists contributed to the study of attachment. Ainsworth, Main and Solomon are the main researchers who theorized the different styles of attachment that can be observed in the relationship of a person to another. These attachment styles include: secure, ambivalent-secure, avoidant-insecure and disorganized insecure attachments.

1. Secure Attachment

When children are securely attached to their caregivers (parents), they feel happy whenever their caregivers are around, but are upset when they get separated from them. While the child is in distress when his parent is away, still, he feels secured with the feeling that his caregiver will return sometime soon.

2. Ambivalent Attachment

A child who is ambivalently attached becomes very upset and sorrowful whenever he gets separated from his parent. The child does not feel that he can rely on his caregiver whenever he is in need of something.

3. Avoidant Attachment

Simply put, a child who has an avoidant attachment tends to keep away from his parents. Studies revealed that this may be a cause of parents who are fond of neglecting or abusing their children.

4. Disorganized Attachment

This is when there is no clear (or mixed) attachment between the child and his caregiver. When the parent acts as an apprehensive caregiver and a reassuring one at different times, the child may get confused and cause this kind of attachment.

Why is studying Bowlby's Attachment Theory important? Many studies have found out that determining the attachment style in social relationships have a lasting effect on the future behavior of people.

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