

Attachment and Your Child

What is Attachment?

Attachment is part of everyone's life – it is our bond with others, particularly those people we turn to when we are afraid or need comfort. Attachment exists from cradle to grave – we do not grow out of it. Our children have attachment bonds with us. They depend on us, both physically and emotionally, for their survival. Even if children act as if they are pushing us away, this does not mean they are not attached to us or don't need us.

Why is Attachment Important to Child Development?

Attachment is a safety net for healthy development. When children are securely attached, they feel comfortable exploring their environment – they do not cling to us unnecessarily – they are free to learn new things about the world and develop new relationships. They also feel comfortable coming to us for help when they need it. They do not try to hide their fears, or avoid us when they are upset. A secure bond provides a good balance of comfort and safety on the one hand, and support for learning new things about the world on the other.

What Does Attachment Have to Do with Behaviour?

Behaviour is a way of communicating our feelings and expectations about having our attachment needs met. When children are anxious, afraid, or just have a difficult time knowing how to express their attachment needs, they may become aggressive or noncompliant, or they may withdraw. When we understand the attachment needs underneath their behaviour, we can respond in ways that help our children sort out their feelings and needs so they can communicate them more clearly and less aggressively. Problem behaviour can be reduced and the bond between children and ourselves can be strengthened.

What Does Attachment Have to Do with Me as a Parent?

Attachment is something that is shared between children and parents – it is a 'shared partnership'. You build the relationship together, you change it together, and you are both changed by it. Your understanding and behaviour in the relationship has a powerful impact on your child's behaviour and development. By understanding attachment in your relationship with your child, you can respond in ways that support healthy development and strengthen the bond between you.

