

# Importance of early infant attachment and child development



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The importance of early infant attachment cannot be overstated. It is at the heart of healthy child development and lays the foundation for relating intimately with others, including spouses and children. It affects parents' abilities to nurture and to be responsive to their children. The effects of infant attachment are long-term, influencing generations of families.

According to Bowlby who developed theory of infant-caregiver attachment, attachment security represents the child's confidence in his or her caregiver, and is evident through the child's preferential desire for contact with the caregiver and use of the caregiver as a "secure base" from which to explore the environment. The parent-child attachment relationship forms through early patterns of interaction between the caregiver and child. Attachment theory has been the predominant framework for the study of parent-child relationships in early childhood, and may well provide a useful approach for understanding fathers and child development. A vast body of research from this perspective indicates that attachment security is an index of parent-child relationship quality that develops largely as a function of parenting behavior. Nonetheless, despite a voluminous body of research on parenting and mother-child attachment, we still know relatively little about attachment relationships between other caregivers such as a father and adoptive parents. The broad societal changes that have occurred in the United States during the past three decades resulted in more mothers of infants working outside the home and, in many cases, new roles for fathers within the home. Therefore, this paper explores can an infant develop secure attachment to a caregiver other than their primary caregiver, usually mother, and then how father and foster mother-infant attachment relationship different from ordinary infant-mother relationship.

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Importantly, sensitivity has been explored as a prominent predictor of caregiver-infant attachment security in early childhood. Still the relatively few studies examining the relationship between parenting quality and attachment with fathers, some researches on father-child attachment suggests that fathers are capable of providing sensitive care for their children as much as mothers can; therefore, the strength of association between father and child seems to be similar to that usually found with mothers (Brown, McBride, Shin & Bost, 2007). Moreover, Brown et al. (2007) found that when fathers engaged in positive parenting behaviors, father involvement seemed to have no impact on father-child attachment security. That is, children formed relatively secure attachment relationships regardless of whether or not their fathers were relatively highly involved. On the contrary, when fathers engaged in less desirable parenting, increased father involvement was actually related to a less secure father-child relationship. In addition, another research found that fathers who viewed the parental role as important were more likely to have securely attached infants, but this association was significant only when marital quality was high, perhaps because fathers are more likely to receive support from their spouse in a harmonious marriage (Wong, Mangelsdorf, Brown, Neff & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2009) Yet interestingly, temperamentally difficult infants might especially benefit from their fathers' valuing the paternal caregiving role, because fathers who valued the importance of such role might be more likely to help out with day-to-day caregiving activities and be more attuned to their infants' emotional capacity to respond to these infants' demand. As a result, temperamentally difficult infants would be likely to develop secure attachment relationships to fathers in this context.

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Therefore, the degree to which father involvement accrues benefits for father-child attachment is dependent upon fathers' parenting quality.

Although all adopted children experience a major separation from their primary attachment figures and placement with new attachment figures in the adoptive family, only some of the adopted children, and in a varying degree, experience neglect or abuse, lack of personal attention in an institution, recurrent changes in parental figures, and unstable care in an understanding or affectionless environment. Juffer and Rosenboom (1997) examined 80 mothers and their infant from Sri Lanka, South Korea, and Colombia, adopted between at age of 6 month and 8 month olds, in the Strange Situation as 12 and 18 months to assess the infant-mother attachment relationship. According to their study, they did not reveal an over-representation of insecure infant-mother attachment relationship. The percentage of secure attachment was 74% at 12 months and 75% at 18 months and stability of 68% was observed in their sample: 46 of 58 infants were secure at both and 18 months, 8 of 21 infants remained insecure (Juffer & Rosenboom, 1997). Therefore, the study found as many secure infant-parent attachment relationships as normally expected. Another study of attachment between fostering parents and infant also showed that the quality of mother-infant attachment in middle-class adoptive families is similar to that found in nonadoptive families; however, interracial mother-infant pairs tend to have insecure attachment (Singer, 1985). Higher rates of insecure attachment also have found among infants who were adopted after spending at least 8 months in a Romanian orphanage and. Infants who adopted at an earlier age, by contrast, do not appear to have an elevated

rate of insecure attachment to their adoptive parent (Chisholm, 1998). From these results, although there are many complications to consider, adopted infants appear to be able to use their new parents as a secure base, and also, that adoptive parents appear to be sensitive enough to the needs of their adopted baby to become a secure base. Yet adopted age of infants seems to be a critical factor whether they develop secure or insecure attachment to fostering parents.

Since infants can develop securely attached relationship to other caregivers as mothers do, the long term effects such as resiliency to new environments and having positive behaviors and expectancies are assumed to be similar. Even though the overall comparison of attachment in adoptive and non-adoptive families was reasonably similar, the results sometimes do not rule out the potential importance of insecure or disrupted post-infancy family relationships as a basis for the adjustment problems of the adoptee. The study noted that as school-age children begin to understand the implications of adoption, including the reality of being relinquished by biological parents, they often feel confused, uncertain, and insecure regarding their current adoptive family relationship (Singer, 1985). In turn, these feelings may play an important role in the manifestation of socioemotional and school-related problems during this period. For that reason, it seems that the higher incidence of problems reported later in life in adoptive families cannot be explained by only early attachment problems.

In conclusion, infants can develop secure attachment not only to their mothers but also other caregivers, including fathers and adoptive parents. It seems that infants can become attached to any caregivers, provided that <https://assignbuster.com/importance-of-early-infant-attachment-and-child-development/>

those caregivers interact with them on a regular basis, provide physical and emotional care, and are emotionally invested in the child. Sensitivity also plays an important role in development of secure attachment between caregiver and infant; on the other hand, the amount of time parents and children spend together is much less than what they do with that time. The similar positive outcome of secure attachment can be expected to the attachment relationship among father- and adoptive parents-infant.