

Good parenting advice for first time parents



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Being or becoming a parent is one of the most challenging, yet most natural things people may face during their life. A first-time parent may feel overwhelmed by the situation, therefore it is important to learn from other parents and research carried out in this area. This essay will look at some of the most important pieces of advice that a good parent can have, which will hopefully lead to a 'good' parenting. First it will outline more about what it means to be a parent. Secondly it will specify different theories of child development. Then it will look at attachment and the Internal working Model and why secure attachment is important in early childhood. And finally it will look at first relationships and how infants experience distress.

A parent is someone who has a responsibility to raise and guide a person from child, to adolescent, all their way up until their offspring is an adult. Parents are important, because they are the main example for their child on how to interact with the world and how they should lead their life. A parent is a bit like a 'rules' book or instruction manual, on how to live life, for a child. Good parenting is difficult to define, as one definition does not fit all, however it refers to finding a good balance within all aspects of how to be a 'good' parent. Many successful people are often heard praising their parents and upbringing for their success; this could be due to a result of 'good' parenting. If there is 'good', there must be 'bad' parenting. Many criminals state that abusive or poor parenting is a cause for their behaviour. It is also important to realize that parenting has changed over the last 50 years, and that the term and expectations of a 'parent' differs not only over time, but also culturally and socially, therefore what one can see as good parenting, can other disapprove. (Oates, Lewis and Lamb, 2005)

There are different theories of child development, and each of them focuses on different aspects of development. Psychoanalytic theory's central stage is to put importance to early period of childhood, as that influence the development of adult personality. Freud stressed the importance of childhood events and experience. He saw child development as series of 'psychosexual stages', where each stage played a role in adult personality. (Oates, 2005) Another theory is cognitive theory, which argues that development of interactions from birth leads to the emergence of language. Piaget saw children think differently from adults, and as a first person, he saw children play an active role in gaining knowledge of the world. Behavioural theory looks at how environmental interaction influences behaviour; development is shaped by reaction to rewards, punishments, stimuli or reinforcement. Theory which looks at early relationships is Social theory, where Bowlby (1988) argues that early relationships with caregivers play a major role in child development and continue to influence social relationships throughout life.

The way in which newborns create new attachments and form their first relationships is very important. This is because these attachments and relationships could potentially provide the 'blue print' for that person for the rest of their lives. Therefore an important bit of advice would be to provide lots of healthy attachments for babies early on in their lives. An attachment is something that we have a close bond to or a special relationship with. This can be with an object or a person. Bowlby (1988) believed that attachment is vital to make healthy attachments, not only one, but a variety, as this could lead to a more developed 'Internal working model' (IWM). An IWM is made

up of three parts; the model of self, model of the 'other' and the relationship between these. The first experiences which babies have build their IWM, and this is what they use to approach new ideas and situations with. Therefore this model helps them to use this prior knowledge of attachments when they are in new situations with a different objects or people. A healthy attachment is a long-term, stable relationship between a child and an object or person, in this situation a parent. It is important for the child to make strong healthy attachments with not only parents, but also with other people, such as their grandparents or caregivers. The more relationships the baby has, the better outcome for the child's IWM, it also leads to healthy emotional development.

Ainsworth's Strange Situation (1978) experiment created four types of attachment, that a child's IWM can take. The four types are insecure-avoidant (Type A), securely attached (Type B), insecure-resistant/ambivalent (Type C) or disorientated/disorganized (Type D). The Strange Situation experiment examines attachments and its developmental consequences. The experiment looks at the behaviours and actions of a child, when they have been separated from their parent and then when reunited. Ainsworth noticed that it was when the child and the parent were reunited, that a child's type was most evident. Mothers of secure infants respond to all of their child's emotions, therefore the infants learn that all emotions are 'valid' in relationship. When reunited the child found easy to be comforted by its mother. The avoidant infants show only few emotions, which are mostly negative. The mothers are unresponsive to most of the emotions, especially the negative ones. Therefore these infants learn to hide their emotions. At the reunion, these children avoid interaction with their parents. Mothers, who

respond only to distress responds of their infants, tend to have ambivalent infants. These infants learn that negative emotions get the attention of their mother and that these emotions are the ' valid' ones in the relationship. These child children will seek contact and interaction at the reunion, but when it is offered, they reject it. These results showed that important factor of developing infant's different types of IWM can be influenced by their mother's sensitivity to their infant's emotional communications and emotions. (Ainsworth, 1969) Child with secure attachment feels worthy of his parent's attention and love, and can gain comfort from this feeling when they are separated, and has confidence that his parent will return. According to Meins et al. (2001), parents, who treat their infants as ' persons' with their own feelings and thoughts, contribute to their secure attachment. Bowlby (1988) argues that is important to have secure attachment, because these children might approach a relationship with more confidence than someone who has insecure attachment. The attachment theory puts forward that an infant who has a secure attachment with one or both parents will be able to use them as a secure base in which to explore their environment. This is because their IWM represent that of their parent figures. An example of importance of ' secure attachment' and how IWM works can be seen in the programme by Dr Acquarone (2006). Marni had problem with her sleeping habits, she woke up through the night and needed her mother to comfort her. She had formed an attachment to her mother, as she feels secure with her, but as Dr Acquarone suggested, Marni has not formed a sufficiently stable internal working model for her to use as a source of comfort when her mother is not available. Therefore Marni needs to find and develop an

attachment to a ' substitute' transactional object, which will help her in this situation.

It is important to remember that the baby is also a ' person', how a parent relates to the child in the early life will have a direct influence on its future. Throughout our lives we have many relationships. As people are predominately social, it is important that they learn how to make good strong relationships. It is important to make relationships not only for our physical needs, but also for our psychological development. Human's first relationship is very important. Winnicott (1964) stated that ' there is no such thing as a baby... if you set out to describe a baby; you will find that you are describing a baby and someone. A baby cannot exist alone, but is essentially part of a relationship.' (Winnicott, 1964, p. 88) The caregivers are providing the physical needs for the baby; such as food, warmth and support, furthermore they are providing the opportunity for the baby to form a relationship with them. As part of a good relationship, it is important that an infants and an adult's social interactions fit well together, this is known as ' meshing'. Oates (2005) assumed that meshed interactions between mother and infant can give the infant the unique experience of taking part in a dialogue, which also provides the experience of relatedness. Therefore mashing is very important, because interacting with infants provides an opportunity for the infant to recognize what his/her behaviour means, and how others respond to it. However, infants are very sensitive to their mother's responsiveness, as can be seen from Murray and Trevarthen (1985) study. Infants who were interacting with their mothers through a video link, where the live link was replaced by a delay or replay of the recording, made

the infants distressed, as the mother was not corresponding to the infants needs properly.

Shuttleworth (1989) assumed that distress is a crucial experience in infancy, which should not be avoided as it creates intimate contact between mother and baby. Each parent deals differently with distressed baby. Winnicott (1965) stated that it is very important for mother to be emotionally available to her infant to build up a 'system' of two-way communication. He also believed that infant should be allowed to experience tolerable frustration as this leads to a healthy development of independence and sense of self.

Therefore he challenged the term 'good mother', as he sees 'good mother' as someone who allows just the right amount of delay in meeting the infant's needs. Studies were done on what is the best to do with distressed babies.

For example Ainsworth and Bell (1970) found that babies, whose crying was ignored early, were later crying more frequently than babies whose mothers responded quickly to their babies needs. These findings agree with attachment theory, where the idea is that mother respond immediately to her baby's needs. However not all studies have same results. Some suggests that baby cries more frequently if the mother responds too often, this agrees with Social learning theory. In the study of Clarke-Steward (1973) on 11, 14 and 17 months old babies was found that mothers who respond promptly to distress infants were among the least fretful. However, when the results were examined separately in gender, the girls were the most and the least fretful even their mothers were very responsive to their signals of distress. This results support the predictions of both social-learning theorists and attachment theorists, which examples were mentioned above.

Being a first-time parent can be a very challenging and difficult period in a person's life. Therefore it is vital that help is at hand. This has led to many theories on child development. Parenting style is an important factor, and each parent must do what they feel is best for their child. This essay has identified some theories and examined research that explores attachments and relationships. It suggested that communication is very important between the mother and her infant, and that communication and attachment has an influence on the emotional development of the child. These would be important bits of information to pass on, because looking at these theories puts being a first-time parent into perspective. They demonstrate how the actions of the parent will have an effect on the baby possibly for the rest of his life. Primary relationships and attachments create the life blue-print for that baby. Obviously mistakes happen and parents cannot be perfect all the time. So along with the advice in any parent help book or any research carried out, it is important for the parent to just do their best no matter what happens.

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