

Theories of attachment

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The components of a healthy mother-child bonding includes hugging, kissing, cooing, caressing and holding the infant more often, especially in the first few hours after birth. All these are designed to promote early contact between mother and child in which studies showed this in turn leads to increased likelihood of breast-feeding, longer periods of breast-feeding and talking or speaking to the child in a more sensitive manner (Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2010, p. 114). The importance of healthy bonding is to ensure the very survival of a baby who is overly dependent on the mother, unlike other mammals or animals who can more or less fend for themselves right after birth. New longer-term research studies had likewise shown that bonding occurs not only if the mother cares for the child but also with the fathers (Belluck, 2011, p. 1) in which fatherhood is a crucial component in raising successfully the child and of nurturing a family.

One attachment theory developed by psychiatrist and psychoanalyst John Bowlby had emphasized the need of infants to have one consistent primary caregiver to whom they can attach normally during their social and emotional development, typically from 6 months to 2 years old. Usually, it is the mother that provides the need for an attachment figure but other people may in some cases be acceptable such as the father, the grandmother, the older sibling or close relatives.

Another prominent theory on bonding is the one developed by Klaus and Kennell which states that maternal bonding is important which in turn gave rise to the new practice of bringing a new baby to its mother instead of being
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brought to the nursery. The theory became controversial as they postulated that maternal deprivation can lead to maladjustments later on such as an eating disorder, personality defects, juvenile delinquency and substance abuse by a failure to bond.

I believe the attachment theory that is best aligned and integrated with my own views of attachment is the single caregiver theory. Infants stick to one caregiver during their first months of existence and any changes will result in the so-called separation anxiety as the infant grows a bit older and able to recognize faces and voices. It is therefore very vital to have only one person as the primary caregiver, maybe relieved by someone else but only for brief periods of time so as not to cause stress, anxiety, fear or other negative emotions on the baby who sees long periods of separation as a threat to its survival. The attachment theory by Bowlby is now generally accepted and is used to guide new therapies and also in formulating social and childcare policies today.

Bonding refers to the feelings of the mother towards her baby while attachment is the strong emotional bond that develops between them. The short-term benefits for the baby is its immediate survival (Rathus, 2010, p. 115) while the longer term effects of good attachment is an ability to later on develop other types of bonding in adult life, again as propounded by Bowlby. The theory of attachment is built on the concept of a close emotional relationship between two persons that in this case, pertains to a mother and her infant or child. The four characteristics of a good bonding-attachment are proximity, separation anxiety, pleasure upon reuniting and lastly, a general orientation of an infants behavior towards the primary caregiver being just around or in a nearby place (close proximity) for its own reassurance

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(Maccoby, 1980, p. 81).

Any caregiver must therefore pay close attention to these four factors or characteristics in caring for the infant. Additionally, Klaus and Kennell had also proposed their separate theory of skin-to-skin contact to develop stronger and closer bonds by experimenting with two groups of newly-born infants. At any rate, bonding develops later on to be used as schema in adulthood.

References

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