

## Secure strategies

The use of 'secure' strategies arise when a caregiver is sensitive, available, reliable and loving. The sensitivity and reliability of their care provides the child with a sense of safety, knowing that when they cry, their needs will be met. The child will see themselves as good, loveable and able to achieve their goals. The child will view the world as a safe place- safe for them to explore.

### Origin of secure strategies

Secure strategies arise from a child experiencing a sensitive primary caregiver. This means that the 'parent' displayed acceptance, co-operation and accessibility. The child knows that their cries will be heard and understood and thus, their needs shall be met. Therefore, the crying ends when the need has been met and the child is soothed. The parent shows love and as such, the child believes they are loveable.

### Points to remember:

- Children are not restricted to being one 'type' of attachment. Their behaviours and experiences are often complex and therefore their attachment strategies may straddle multiple groups e.g. they may display both avoidant and ambivalent strategies
- We all may display a range of different insecure and secure attachment strategies in our own relationships. The difference between ours and those of fostered/adopted children is that theirs may be much more extreme. Their experiences with their attachment figure(s) may have a significantly greater negative impact on their social, emotional and cognitive development.
- Their attachment behaviours are not set in stone- We can provide them with a more secure and healthy model of a relationship in which they can see themselves as good; other people as trustworthy and the world as a safe place.

## Disorganized strategies

Disorganised strategies develop when a caregiver is frightening (potentially abusive) or is frightened themselves.

The child realizes that no one behavioural strategy that they employ is successful at reducing the fear or obtaining love and sensitive care. This creates a sense of overwhelming confusion, distress and powerlessness. As a result, they view themselves as unlovable and inherently bad. This indicates that they feel a deep-rooted sense of shame. They may see other people as frightening or unavailable and the world as a dangerous place.

### Strategies

- A range of various strategies may be used
- The child may freeze or become dissociative (unresponsive)
- The child may develop strategies that are based around control [see below]

### Controlling strategies

Controlling strategies develop as a way of maintaining a sense of predictability and control (safety) over others and frightening situations. The caregiver may have been frightening/frightened or abusive. A child may view themselves as unlovable, bad or powerful. They may see the world as frightening and unavailable. They may view the world as a dangerous place.

### Strategies

- May display controlling, manipulative behaviours (to seek predictability)
- Avoid intimacy (others = bad)
- Display violent aggression/anger
- Display anxiety and dependence
- Difficulties forming and maintaining interpersonal relationships

# ATTACHMENT STRATEGIES:

## A brief guide

A brief overview of attachment and the various strategies a child may employ when interacting with their caregiver.



*Information has been adapted from the book 'Nurturing Attachments: Supporting Children who are Fostered or Adopted' by Kim S. Golding*

## Attachment: What is it?

The term 'attachment' is used to describe the close, enduring relationship between an infant and their primary caregiver, usually their mother or father.

Children develop attachment strategies as a way of seeking and maintaining a *sense of safety*. The quality of care a child receives in their early years shapes the types of attachment behaviours they use to feel safe.

## What does it affect?

- A child's view of themselves e.g. good and loveable or intrinsically bad and unlovable
- A child's 'self-efficacy'- the extent to which they believe they can complete tasks successfully
- A child's social understanding e.g. the extent to which they can understand others and can form (and maintain) healthy friendships
- A child's expectations of future relationships
- A child's ability to experience empathy
- A child's ability to regulate their own emotions and cope under stress
- A child's autonomy- their ability to be appropriately self-reliant (whilst accepting help)
- A child's view of the world (safe or dangerous) and their openness to new experiences and exploration
- A child's cognitive abilities e.g. to understand cause and effect; truth and lies; that other people may hold different beliefs to them (called 'Theory of Mind')

**Note:** A child is not restricted in displaying one certain 'type' of attachment pattern. They may use strategies that cover several categories e.g. both 'anxious' and 'avoidant' behaviours.

*Extreme behaviours can make re-parenting really difficult. If you would like support, please contact the ATTACH team on 01865 897083*

## Insecure: Ambivalent-resistant strategies

Ambivalent-resistant strategies usually develop when a parent fails to respond predictably to a child's needs. The caregiver may be inconsistent with their care or neglectful. As a result, the child may view themselves as unworthy of care-unlovable, bad and unable to achieve goals. The child may view other people as unreliable or disinterested. They may view the world as dangerous.

### Beliefs about life

'You only meet my needs and give me attention when I cry- I should keep crying'

'I am only given attention and care when I cry- I should cry louder/act more aggressive'

'I don't know when I will be cared for again- I should stay close to them'

### Strategies

- Cling/demanding
- Remains distressed, even when comforted (to maintain proximity/care)
- Significant anxiety when separated from caregiver
- Display high levels of dependency upon their caregiver
- Demonstrate extreme 'attention-needing' behaviours/extremes of emotion e.g. aggression, crying, confrontation
- Difficult to please/displays 'black and white' thinking. People/events/objects are either all good or all bad
- Hypervigilant towards indications of rejection in interpersonal relationships

## Insecure: Avoidant

Avoidant strategies are usually used when the caregiver withdraws when the child's needs are expressed. They may be neglectful. The child may view themselves as unworthy of love and as a bad person that can accomplish little. This reflects how they try to make sense of neglectful parenting- 'I am not given care or love, therefore I am unworthy of it'. They may view other people as unavailable, controlling or rejecting.

### Beliefs about life

'My needs are not met when I cry- I should not cry'

'I can meet my needs alone'

'My needs are met if I do exactly as I'm told'

'I shouldn't show that I'm sad/happy/angry'

### Strategies

- Avoids intimacy
- Avoids talking about their feelings
- Avoids expressing their feelings – they are bottled up inside
- Compliant
- Uses humour to mask emotions/divert attention/maintain emotional distance
- Avoids dependency and seeks to be excessively self-reliant- 'parents the parent'