

Promoting early attachment and building resilience



Objectives

1. Refresh and review your knowledge of attachment and how it informs clinical practice.
2. Identify behaviours associated with patterns of attachment and understand the implications for your practice.
3. Baby brain development
4. Understand how Positive attachments builds resilience

Attachment definition

- ▶ Attachment is a relationship quality; it represents the reciprocal behaviour and emotional experience between a child and their closest caregiver(s).
- ▶ Attachment is a deep and enduring emotional bond that connects one person to another across time and space. (Ainsworth, 1973; Bowlby, 1969).

Attachment patterns

Ainsworth worked with Bowlby and identified three attachment patterns:

1. **Secure**
2. **Insecure-avoidant**
3. **Insecure-ambivalent.**
4. **Disorganised** (In 1986 Mary Main, a student of Ainsworth identified a fourth)

•**Secure:** seen in infants who are confident their caregiver will be emotionally available and appropriately responsive.

•**Insecure-avoidant:** seen in infants who have a caregiver who is emotionally unavailable or rejecting.

•**Insecure-ambivalent:** seen in infants who have a caregiver who alternates between being attentive and being inattentive.

•**Disorganised:** seen in infants who have a caregiver who is fearful or overwhelmed by the infant's needs.

Factors which may disrupt positive attachment

- ▶ Adverse childhood experience
- ▶ Poor mental health
- ▶ Family breakdown
- ▶ Traumatic birth
- ▶ Gender
- ▶ Drugs/alcohol
- ▶ High parental stress
- ▶ Age of child

3 functions of care-giver - baby interaction for secure attachment to be developed

- ▶ Containment
- ▶ Attunement
- ▶ Reciprocity

Containment

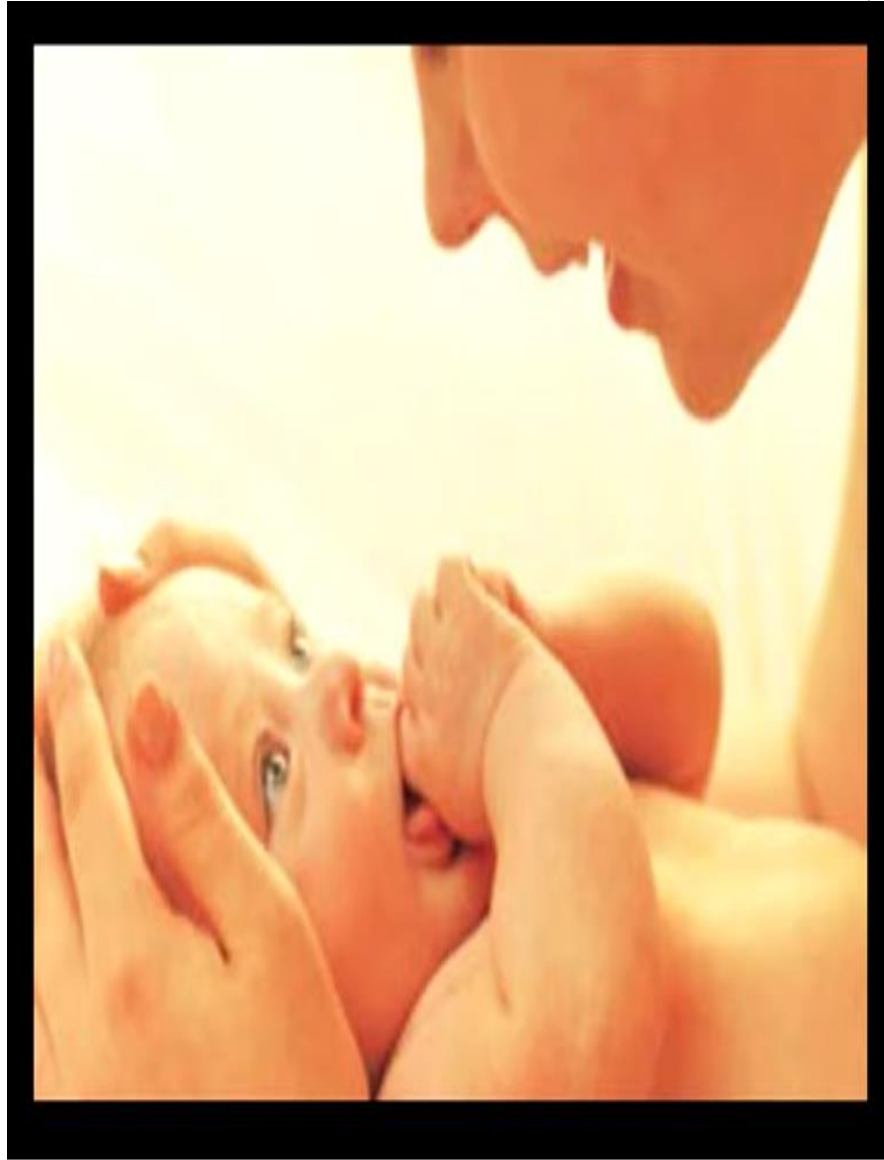
“When a baby’s distress is understood ... taken in by the mother or father and returned in a manageable state ... they learn that the world is a safe, reliable place and that neither he or his feelings are overwhelming.”

Bion called this containment.

- Bion (1977)

Attunement

Attunement describes someone being in touch with both positive and negative mental states, a form of biosocial feedback (Gergely and Watson 1996) that leads to trusting that one's thoughts and feelings can be accepted and understood (Music 2017).



Reciprocity

- ▶ The mutual exchange of responses between an infant and their caregiver.
- ▶ It involves a back-and-forth pattern of communication; the infant's behaviour elicits a response from the caregiver, which in turn influences the infant's behaviour – a bit like a conversation.
- ▶ The infant and caregiver respond to each other's signals to extend the interaction.

An intimate conversation between mother and daughter



An intimate conversation between mother and daughter

Mentalisation

- ▶ A concept with much in common with mind-mindedness (Where a parent shows focus on the child's subjective states, on what they are feeling, thinking and experiencing) which describes the ability to make sense of ones own and others mental states and reflect on these (reflective function)
- ▶ Secure attachment is linked to metalising capacity.

Attachment behaviours

Aversive (0-6 weeks)

The earliest attachment behaviours occur when babies **feel unsafe** (scared, uncertain, hungry, tired, uncomfortable) crying (peaks at 6 weeks. Reduces by 3 months) screaming, back arching.

Attractive Behaviours (6-12 weeks and beyond)

Smiling, cooing, laughing, communicative crying.

Serve and return

When an infant or young child babbles, gestures, or cries, and an adult responds appropriately with eye contact, words, or a hug, neural connections are built and strengthened in the child's brain that support the development of communication and social skills.

[NSPCC Serve and return video](#)



[Still Face Experiment Dr Edward Tronick - YouTube](#)

Fathers

- ▶ Bowlby's original attachment theory has been criticised for failing to consider the father's relationship as a central figure in an infant's life.
- ▶ Evidence suggests that fathers have no less potential to be sensitive to infant signals than mothers (Lamb 2010).
- ▶ Men living with pregnant partners have higher prolactin levels which increases protective feelings and develop lower testosterone levels after the birth, also linked to being less sexually active and more protective (Gettler 2014).
- ▶ Fathers' attachment is thought to consist of three components: **interaction**, **accessibility** and **responsibility**.
- ▶ Transition to fatherhood can take longer - up to 2 years for fathers, compared with 9 months for mothers.

Importance of father attachment

- ▶ Early paternal involvement predicts educational achievement in adulthood for both genders.
- ▶ A secure relationship with a father can offset an insecure one with a mother and vice versa. Best of all is to have both.
- ▶ Overall research shows that on average the presence of an active nurturing father is likely to be beneficial to many aspects of a child's development

Important to note that the quality of the couple relationship is key to a child's development.



Babies brains

We all have responsibility to positively build baby brains.

Babies' brains 1

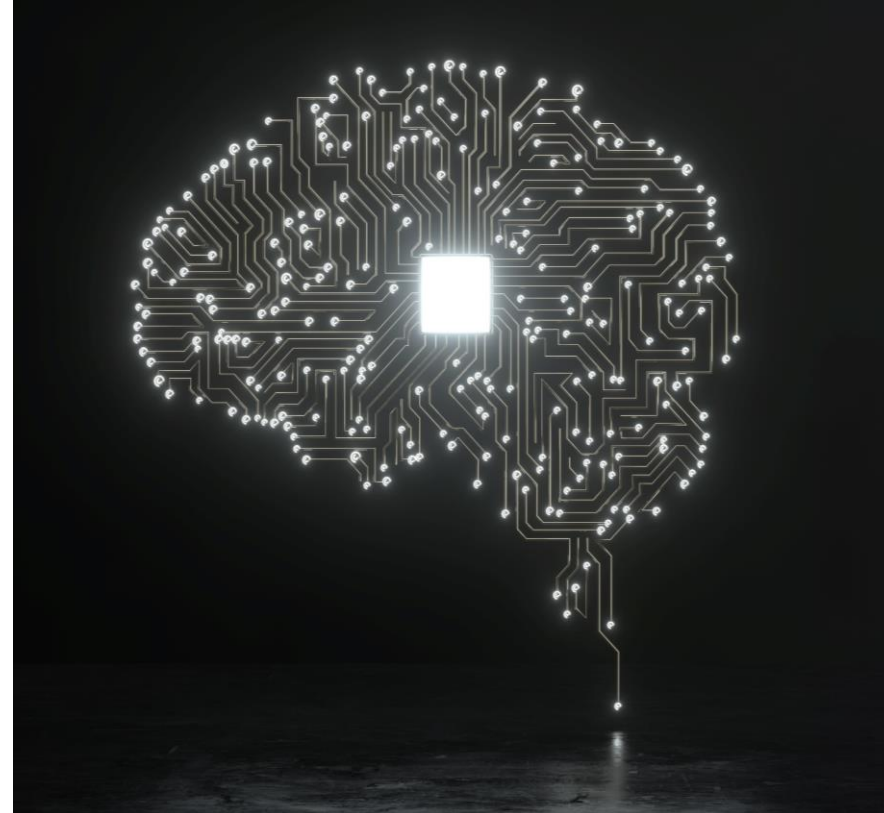
- ▶ Humans are the primate with the least developed brain at birth which means babies need sustained care over a long period from the caregiver to enable the brain to develop.
- ▶ Brain development is both experience expectant and experience dependant.

“The baby is an interactive project, not a self-powered one.”

- Gerhardt (2004)

Babies' brains 2

- ▶ Babies are born with **100 billion** brain cells, but they are largely unconnected.
- ▶ Brain growth is unmatched in the first six months of life.
- ▶ A baby's brain weighs on average 400g at birth. By the time they are 12 months old, it weighs **1000g**.
- ▶ **90%** of brain growth happens in the first five years of life.
- ▶ Brain structures are literally being built on a daily basis.



Positive attachment builds resilience

Resilience

Resilience is **what gives people the psychological strength to cope with stress and hardship**. It is the mental reservoir of strength that people are able to call on in times of need to carry them through without falling apart. Psychologists believe that resilient individuals are better able to handle adversity and rebuild their lives after a struggle.

Positive attachment builds resilience

Secure Attachment: Needs met most of the time

- ▶ The world is safe
- ▶ Can cope with situations as able to self regulate
- ▶ People will come to my aid
- ▶ I can make friends
- ▶ I trust people around me
- ▶ I am worthy

Attachment tools

- ▶ Mothers Object Relations Scales (MORS) validated attachment assessment tool, can also be used with fathers
- ▶ Video Interaction Guidance VIG therapeutic intervention: highlighting and building on positive moments in parent-child interaction

Further training

- ▶ Safeguarding websites
- ▶ Wiltshire provide 5-thrive. An attachment based approach to positive parenting
- ▶ ICON training
- ▶ Fathers institute

Questions

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