

childPSYCH News

A newsletter for professionals and parents

Inside this issue:

The Importance of Parent-Child Bonding	1
Motivations for Teenagers Misbehaviour	2
Encouragement and Praise	2

We're on the web
www.childpsych.net.au

Special points of interest:

At *childpsych* only psychologists who are registered teachers Educational Psychologists will write the report on learning difficulties

All *childpsych* psychologists have a minimum of masters level training in psychology

To unsubscribe from this newsletter at any time, either email or call *childpsych*

The Importance of Parent-Child Bonding

Feature article by Annemari de Korte MAPS, Counselling Psychologist at *childpsych*

Attachment pertains to the emotional tie or bond between two people (of any age) but is most commonly used to refer to the bond between a child and its carer. The essence of attachment theory is that all humans have an inborn drive to attach to a care giving figure. Where the attachment figure responds with reliable, sensitive and consistent care, the child will be able to establish a trusting and secure attachment. This allows the child to explore the environment with confidence, safe in the knowledge that the caregiver will be available should comfort be needed. However, where nurturance is unpredictable, harsh or inconsistent, various patterns of insecure attachment may occur. Anxious / ambivalent patterns occur when the child becomes distressed and escalates clinging behaviour in an attempt to avoid separation. Avoidant patterns occur when the child shows very little contact-seeking with the attachment figure. Disorganised patterns show confused, contradictory behaviours towards the attachment figure.

Why are attachment relationships important?

Attachment relationships form the foundation for the child's emotional and social worlds. Attachment theorists use the term *inner working model* to describe how we learn through our early attachment relationships to build up a view of ourselves



The essence of attachment theory is that all humans have an inborn drive to attach to a care giving figure

and form expectations about how others will respond to us. The securely attached child will come to view people as generally trustworthy and the world as a safe place in general. Furthermore, they will develop a view of themselves as worthy of love, an important building block of healthy self-esteem. On the other hand, the insecurely attached child will fail to develop the same level of trust in others and the world in general, resulting in feelings of being unloved, unlovable and inadequate.

Attachment and Fear

John Bowlby, the founder of attachment theory, views fear as a central emotion. He describes the responsive, sensitive attachment figure as a *secure base* from which the young child ventures out to explore the world. This means that when an attachment figure is within easy reach, the infant or toddler is more likely to feel secure and consequently explore their environment. When this sense of security is threatened, it results in anxiety, a sense of loss and of-

ten anger.

The child with a history of secure attachment relationships will develop pervasive feelings of security, whereas a history of insecure attachments may put the child at risk of intense and / or chronic fear. Neurological research has indicated a clear link between intense early emotional experiences and brain development in areas such as the limbic system, which is responsible for basic emotions. When a child is repeatedly exposed to over-arousal causing chronic fear (e.g. via ongoing domestic violence) areas in the limbic system require increasingly less stimulation to become highly aroused. This may lead to chronic emotional over-arousal in the individual (in this case, chronic fear even in the absence of fearful stimuli).

Emotional Self-Regulation and Personality Formation

Emotional self-regulation refers to an individual's ability to manage emotional experiences and maintain comfortable levels of emotional arousal in order to accomplish goals. Individuals who do not possess this ability are always at risk of being over- or under-aroused, or anxious about becoming overwhelmed by their experiences. Attachment theorists maintain that our ability to regulate our emotions is highly dependent on the nature of our earliest attachment relationships.

Continue over...

CHILDPSYCH:PSYCHOLOGY PRACTICE

4 / 671 Sherwood Road
Sherwood Q 4075

DIRECTOR: PHILIP O. GOSSCHALK MAPS

Phone / Fax: 07 3716 0445
Email: admin@childpsych.net.au

You maybe able to see
us under Medicare
See our website for more
information

“Difficulties with emotional regulation may contribute to behavioural difficulties such as impulsivity, non-compliance and aggression”

Parent-Child Bonding con't

Through sensitive, consistent and responsive early attachment experiences the young child learns whether the carer can be trusted to generally help keep their arousal levels at comfortable levels. After the first six months and following many cycles of arousal escalation and de-escalation within the attachment relationship, the infant also gradually starts to develop the ability to regulate its own emotional state.

Children who are exposed to unpredictable, insensitive and unresponsive caregivers do not have these emotionally supportive experiences. Since their own self-regulatory abilities are still developing, they may repeatedly become overwhelmed by their emotions. Difficulties with emotional regulation may contribute to behavioural difficulties such as impulsivity, non-compliance and aggression. Studies have found associations between externalising behaviours and avoidant attachment patterns; and early signs of peer problems and insecure attachments with both father and mother figures.

Develop appropriate attachments by:

1. Listening to your children and helping them solve their problems
2. Let your children try and solve their own problems before you “step in”
3. Be consistent in your parenting

Motivations for Teenagers Mis-Behaviour

There are many ways to consider why teenagers may mis-behave. Four possible explanations are described here.

Teenagers who are **attention seeking** may do so in ways such as tapping their pencil, showing off and so on. Teenagers who seek **power** are defiant, and learn from the age of 2 the power of saying “no”. Such defiant teenagers may openly rebel and challenge authority whereas others will quietly refuse. Some teenagers will engage in **revenge** seeking behaviour such as lying, stealing or hurting others. The fourth goal of misbehaviour is **inadequacy**. Some teenagers withdraw from daily life. Their message is “don’t expect anything from me, I am incapable”.

Responding to the goal of Attention – you could respond to attention getting behaviour with annoyance, command your child to stop, give in, use reminding or coaxing. However, if we look at these alternatives, you’re providing attention! Instead teach **self-reliance** by first ignoring attention getting behaviour and noticing your child when they are being ‘good’.

Responding to the goal of Power – when a child uses power it is natural to feel that our authority is being challenged. If you respond with

anger to assert your power then all you’re doing is teaching your child that anger is a way to get control. Respond by withdrawing from the conflict. Teach **cooperation** by enlisting the help, opinions, and suggestions of your teenager.

Responding to the goal of Revenge – an upset teenager (and adults!) can react with revenge when they’re hurt. If we react with hurtful comments then we are eroding the trust and understanding between our teenagers and us. Instead teach **empathy** by telling your teenager (as calmly as possible) that you understand they’re upset, you still love them, and are willing to help them through this situation BUT you are frustrated that they’ve chosen hurtful comments to make their point.

Responding to the goal of Inadequacy – it is easy to respond to the teenager who displays inadequacy by sympathising. But all that we are doing is telling them that their situation is hopeless. Instead, build **faith** and **determination** in your teenager by showing them your confidence. Tell them that you know things are going to be rough, but you believe they are capable of handling the challenges of life.



Encouragement and Praise

The use of encouragement and praise is instrumental in helping children and adolescents to meet their potential and be contributing members of society and their families. There are different perspectives on how to do this however. The most common approach is to recognise good behaviour by comments such as, “well done” or “good girl”. The problem here is that this



form of praise is vague and young children do not always make the connection between your praise and what they have actually done! Instead, **behavioural praise** is often recommended. This form of praise helps the child to understand what they have specifically done that is appropriate. For example, “well done Mark, you did as you were told fast”.

For older children above age

10, and adolescents, it is always good to incorporate the concept of “encouragement”. This is where the adult lets the child know how their behaviour has been helpful. This develops a sense of community and strengthens family bonds. For example, “thanks for that Jane, I appreciate you helping me bring in the groceries”.

Remember to be genuine in your praise and to use it in conjunction with a hug, touch or smile.


childpsych

PSYCHOLOGY PRACTICE

They're the most
important thing
in your life
and sometimes they need our help