

### Understanding Attachment

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Attachment affects all humans. It is part of the development of lasting relationships with one another. Attachments vary with one person to another and children form many attachment relationships. The child's ability and opportunities to form attachment influences their overall development, their ability to form relationships with others around them and their self-identity.

While parents and close family members are the child's main attachment, the development of relationships with others such as childcare workers, friends etc. play an important role.

According to John Bowlby (1969/1982) an infants attachment to the mother is a biological need, a survival mechanism and critical to the child's wellbeing. Therefore from an attachment perspective the quality of early relationships outside the immediate family i.e. a childcare service, depends on the childcare worker's capacity to be emotionally available, sensitive and responsive to the child's needs.

The overall goal of the childcare worker is to support the child's attachment needs and to provide a secure base from which the child is able to explore the social and physical environment. Talking to parents about the concerns of attachment and separation is no easy task. Childcare workers need to develop a sound relationship with the parent to be able to work together.

#### **Food for thought**

- ❖ A secure base is a person the child can go to for comfort and make them feel safe.
- ❖ Strong attachment levels develop over time.
- ❖ Understanding children's attachment relationships assists in supporting a child separating from the parent while in care.
- ❖ Childcare workers need to accept that separation is stressful both to the child and the parent and needs to make this known to parent and child.
- ❖ Before being able to assist a child to move towards a secure model of attachment, consideration of the nature of the child's current pattern of attachment relationships needs to be taken.
- ❖ Open two way communication between parents and staff is the foundation of a shared care approach to child care.
- ❖ Once the child care worker has identified the concern, it is important to consider the perspective of the parent. If you don't know, you need to discuss this with the parent.

### Strategies to Support Parents and Early Childhood Education and Care Workers

- Closely observe the child at times when they are demonstrating an attachment to another person (appropriately or inappropriately) and identify patterns of behaviour that are typical.
- Acknowledge that separating from the parent is both hard for the child and the parent.
- Allow the child time to attach to the carer when the parent leaves i.e. sitting on your lap, giving cuddles, allowing the child to stay near.
- Support the child's emotional needs rather than firstly trying to distract.
- Consider routines that can create an easier separation e.g. greeting the child and parent, putting bag away, waving good bye at the door. Maintaining a consistency in these routines will assist in creating a safe and secure environment both for child and parent.
- Discuss with the parent what they hope to gain from their child being in care and illicit the support in separation.
- Provide strategies for the parent to slowly build up the time they are away from their child e.g. get the parent to sit in the staff room for 5 minutes increasing the time away.
- Express to the parents the importance of staff developing a relationship with their child and how this will assist with the child's own self identity.
- Discuss with the parent what the childcare service is there for, including philosophy policy and practices.
- Be clear in what you want to occur within the child care setting and clear in what you want to say to the parent.
- Focus on the behaviour and avoid using judgemental words as "being silly", "manipulative".
- Pick your time well to talk with the parent.
- Allow the parent to share their hopes, dreams concerns and be open to suggestions made.
- Together with the parent develop an action plan to address specific separation behaviours.

#### References:

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