

Attachment and its relevance to older & socially excluded young people

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27.Sept-10

National Children's Bureau, Invited Seminar: The Attachment Needs of
Older and Socially Excluded Young People

Attachment Theory

The importance of bonds of affection over time

Early attachment

Attachment in adolescence

Attachment and “at risk” young people

Attachment Theory

- Proposes a biologically-based need for relationships
- Selective attachments provide support and protection against distress
- Attachment is experienced over the lifespan

Early Attachment

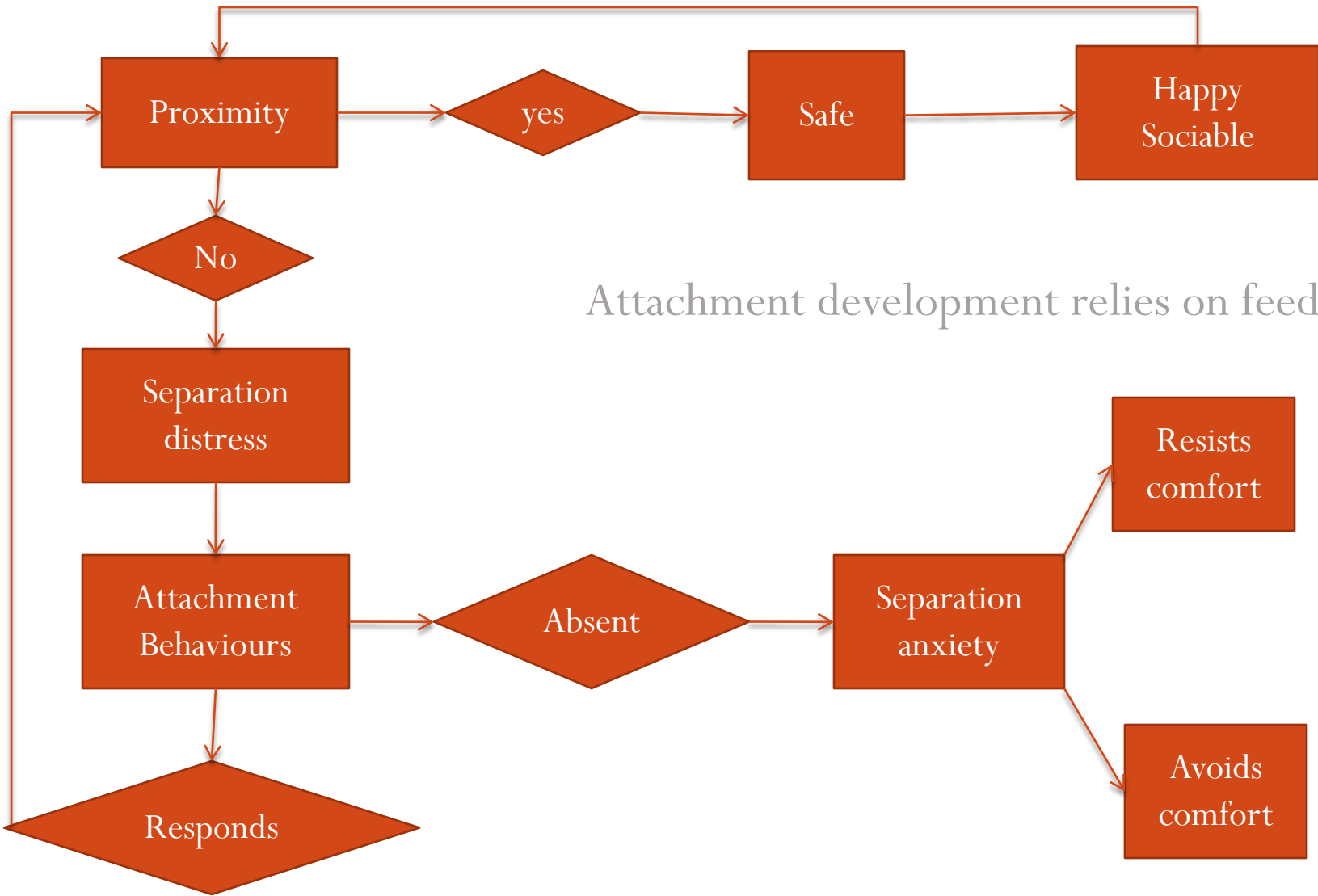
- Childhood attachment seen as the basis for all later intense, reciprocal relationships
- Attachment is a relationship played out across time and contexts with a particular partner
 - Infant attachment is dyadic/relational
 - Over time attachment style becomes increasingly a property of the individual
- Multiple attachments are possible
 - By adulthood these have “coalesced”

Early Attachment

- Infants will form an attachment as long as there is a caregiver to interact with
- “Unattached” only if **no** stable caregiver
 - E.g. Some institutional care
- Selective attachment develops out of a child’s real-life experiences

Caregiving

- The quality of the attachment relationship is dependent on caregiver's
 - Accessibility and responsiveness
 - Emotional attunement
 - Mind mindedness
- The child's overall adjustment is in relation to their attachment network



Attachment development relies on feedback

Attachment Representations

- From 2nd year, children represent the world to themselves in symbolic form
- Formed through **many thousands** of experiences
- Attitudes & beliefs a child develops regarding
 - Self
 - Other
 - Their social world
- Govern behavioural strategies employed beyond infancy
- Relatively stable over time in the absence of change in the child's experience of caregivers

Internal working model

Proximity seeking	Representation of self	Representation of attachment figure
Successful	Loveable, effective worthy of receiving and able to give love	Available, loving, interested and responsive
Unsuccessful	Uninteresting, ineffective, unvalued, unworthy , unwanted	Rejecting, neglectful, inconsistently available, interfering, controlling

Attachment patterns

- Secure
- Anxious/avoidant
- Anxious/ambivalent (resistant)
 - Ainsworth
- Disorganized
 - Main & Solomon
- However, individuals may not fit neatly into one category
- May be dimensional rather than categorical
 - Crittenden, Waters & Beauchaine

Attachment patterns

- Attachment insecurity is not synonymous with a disorder of any kind
- Impaired organization of response to separation is not a disorder, but is rather close to one
- Attachment disorder may be an extreme form of disorganized attachment

Secure attachment

- A long enduring, emotionally meaningful bond to a particular individual who returns these feelings



Secure attachment

- Child experiences self as loveable and effective
- Experiences attachment figure as loving and responsive
- Finds relationship a “secure base” from which to explore

Insecure-avoidant

- Negative attachment representation
- Has learnt not to rely on caregiver
- Learnt other ways of meeting perceived needs
- Continues even if environment changes
- Tests to the limit

Insecure-ambivalent/resistant

- Some positive attachment representation, although negative dominates
- Controls, manipulates, punishes
- Chronic hyper-arousal

Attachment organization

- Repeatable strategy allows maximum proximity to & security from Attachment Figure, whose behaviour to stress and distress is anticipated
- Self-perpetuating developmental pathways
 - Probabilistic, not deterministic

Disorganized

- Dazed and confused
- No mental representation of caregiver
- Throws a diverse range of behaviours at the caregiver in the hope that one may get *perceived needs* met

Disorganized attachment

- Attachment figure is the source of fear
- Child is unable to deactivate attachment system
 - No repeatable/consistent strategy to get attachment needs met
 - Incompatible behaviours: flight and proximity seeking
 - Fear without solution (Main)
- Prevalence – 80% in clinical samples
 - (Carlson, Cicchetti, 1989; Lyons-Ruth, 1996)

Stability of Attachment Style

- Attachment patterns not immutable
- Developmental pathways
 - The longer an outlying pathway is explored, the less likely a return to centrality
 - Self-fulfilling prophecies
- Long-term stability of disorganization remarkably strong
- Inter-generational transmission

Attachment in Adolescence

Adolescence

“At risk” groups

Attachment in Adolescence

- Adolescence is a significant transitional period in the life span
 - Characterized by biological, mental and social changes
 - From a “receiver of care” to independent adult
- “Self-in-relation-to other” important in adolescent exploration
- Separation from primary attachment figures
 - Separation from family made possible by peer groups
 - Enter into intimate relations with equals
 - Gain support and encouragement

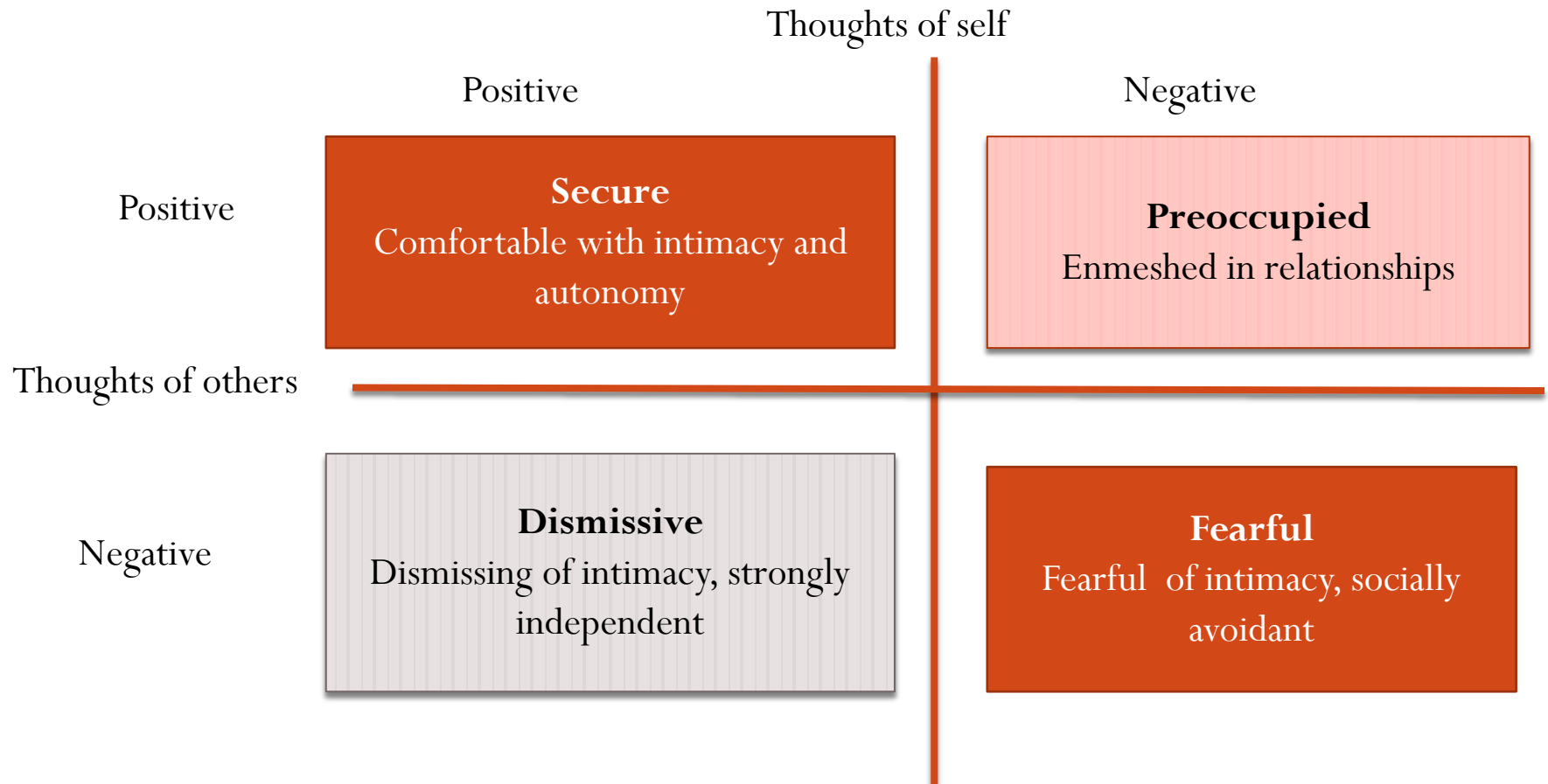
Adolescent attachment

- Cognitive development of logical and abstract thinking
- Growing ability to reflect and view self as distinct from attachment figures
- Gains ability to “de-idealize” the attachment figure
- Peer relationships grow in importance and take on characteristics and functions of attachment relationships:
 - Proximity seeking
 - Distress upon inexplicable separation
 - Joy on reunion
 - Grief at loss
 - Comfort and freer exploration

Adult Attachment Interview

- George, Kaplan & Main, 1984 (revised 1985, 1996)
- Semi-structured interview
 - Long training
- Ingenious method for surprising the unconscious by focussing on linguistic representations of predictability
- Categories
 1. Autonomous-secure
 2. Dismissing-insecure
 3. Preoccupied-entangled
 4. Unresolved-disorganized
 5. Cannot classify

Adult Attachment Styles; Bartholomew & Horowitz (1991)



Insecure-preoccupied

- (e.g. Allen *et al*, 1996; Bernier, *et al*, 2005)
- – if meet enmeshed or passive parenting
- Closely linked preoccupied to internalizing problems
 - Depression
 - Anxiety
 - Stress during transitions
- - if met rejection or ignored
- Closely linked with externalizing problems
 - Delinquency
 - Substance misuse
 - Promiscuity
- - if met with positive friendships: lower risk of delinquent behaviour

Changes in adolescent attachment in responses to others

Adolescent attachment style	“Other’s” response	Coping strategies
Preoccupied	Enmeshed Passive	INTERNALIZING: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depression • Anxiety • Stressful transitions
	Rejecting Ignoring	EXTERNALIZING <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delinquency • Substance misuse • Promiscuity
	Positive friendships	Lower risk of delinquent behaviour
Dismissing	Less sensitive to responsiveness of others	DISTRACT SELF & OTHERS from attachment cues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Substance misuse • Conduct problems

Group attachment	Exploration	Proximity
Secure group attachment	Group as a whole provides a secure base for exploration	Group provides safety and comfort
Insecure-avoidant group attachment	Individual uses group for shared activities and exploration	Individual fearfully reluctant to engage in emotional relationships with group
Insecure-ambivalent group attachment	Intense fluctuations between individual and group activities	Individual vacillates between closeness and distance with group
Disorganized group attachment	Individual dissipated fear through actions, may internalize other group members maladjusted coping	Group generates fear for individual, but is less threatening than primary attachment figure

Insecure-dismissing

- (e.g. Cole-Detke & Kobak, 1996: Allen *et al*, 2007)
- Employ strategies to dismiss self and others from attachment cues
 - Substance misuse
 - Conduct problems
- Have difficulty in getting help from peers or adults
- Social withdrawal
- Less sensitive to parental responses
 - Difficult to influence

Unresolved-disorganized

- (e.g. Fonagy *et al*, 2002, Holmes 2004)
- Aetiological link to severe personality disorders
 - Both BPD and Disorganized represent an approach-avoidance dilemma
 - “I hate you, don’t leave me” “I fear you, don’t leave me”
- Unmet attachment needs of “young child inside” may overwhelm adult caregivers and same-age friends