

## Attachment Theory

Attachment Theory began in the 1940's when John Bowlby sought an alternative to psychoanalytic theory that infants attach to their mother because she is the source of food. He coined the term "internal working model" to describe the way children view the world based on the care they receive, which also influences all later interactions. He noticed that infants would go to anyone for food, but would only go to the mother when upset or frightened.

The "internal working model" of a securely attached child would include the following types of beliefs:

1. I am good, wanted, worthwhile, competent, and lovable
2. Caregivers are responsive to my needs, sensitive, caring and trustworthy
3. The world is safe and life is worth living

The "internal working model" of an insecurely attached child would include the following types of beliefs:

1. I am bad, unwanted, worthless, helpless, and unlovable
2. Caregivers are unresponsive to my needs, insensitive, hurtful and untrustworthy
3. The world is dangerous and life is not worth living

In the 1960's, Mary Ainsworth elaborated on this theory and found three distinct styles of attachment: secure, avoidant, and ambivalent. She described the mother as providing a "safe base" for their infants to explore the world. This provides the infant with safety, protection, regulation of emotion, self-soothing skills, and a sense of organization. The universal attachment behaviors include:

1. long-lasting and intense eye contact
2. following the attachment figure
3. protesting violently and for long periods of time when the attachment figure is absent
4. engaging in reciprocal interactions with the attachment figure
5. being gentle with the attachment figure
6. refusing to be comforted by anyone but the attachment figure
7. complying with the attachment figure's requests even if it is not what the child wants to do.

Ainsworth noted that attachment is only said to be present only when all of these behaviors are demonstrated repeatedly and for the purpose of being close to the attachment figure. Therefore, if these behaviors are shown indiscriminately to other adults or they are absent, there is evidence of an attachment difficulty.

Later research confirmed the "safe base" theory (Harry Harlow). In addition, another type of attachment was discovered (disorganized), which is thought to be the 1-3% of the population that exhibits true attachment disorder.

Attachment can be thought of as a continuum:

Overly Attached	Securely Attached	Insecurely Attached	Attachment Disruption	Attachment Problems	Attachment Disorder
-----------------	-------------------	---------------------	-----------------------	---------------------	---------------------