

ATTACHMENT

Advanced training module

Learning outcomes

At the end of this module, you should be able to:

- Know the basics of attachment theory and research
- Understand the relevance of attachment theory to child protection
- Understand and identify the behaviours of children and young people that may result from poor attachment
- Know how to facilitate positive attachments for children and young people in care
- Know how to promote stability, security and continuity for children and young people in care

Contents of module

- What is attachment?
- Relevance of attachment theory for child protection
- Facilitating attachment
- Promoting stability, security and continuity

SESSION 1

What is attachment?

Attachment

- The emotional connection established between a child and carer
- Early years of life are important

Carer responsiveness

- Children learn to behave in ways to elicit a carer response
- The level and quality of this response is a major factor in a child's attachment to a carer
- Different levels of responsiveness result in different styles of attachment - categorised as secure, anxious resistant, avoidant or disorganised-disorientated

Internal working model

- Responsiveness establishes a child's attachment style with a carer
- And also influences their personality and **perception of self and others** - their 'internal working model'

Secure or insecure

- A child who experiences responsive, nurturing and consistent caregiving is more likely to be securely attached and have a positive self image. This optimistic view of self extends to others who are perceived as trustworthy, caring and protective
- A child who experiences inconsistent, unresponsive or insensitive caregiving can develop an insecure attachment style and have an internal working model that perceives themselves, their environment and others negatively or untrustworthy

Attachment is vital to child development

- We develop a 'sense of self' through our relationships with other people
- The immediate caregivers of babies and children play the most important role in helping them develop a sense of self
- The quality of those relationships has a profound effect on children's socio-emotional development, personality formation and social competence

Attachment - more than bonding

Bonding - the way an adult develops an emotional connection to a child eg cuddling, smiling, playing, feeding, listening, talking

These things are necessary to develop a positive attachment, but they are not sufficient

Attachment requires a relationship **between** the child and the carer – it is not something the carer does to or for the child – it is reciprocal

Limitations of attachment theory

- A theory, a possible explanation – but other explanations are also possible
- Not all children are the same – temperament, resilience, cultural differences
- Poor early attachments can be remedied
- Multiple positive attachments can be facilitated

Summary

- Attachment styles develop as children adapt to the behaviour of their caregivers in seeking to have their needs met
- Attachment styles influence a child's sense of self and others
- Positive attachments help a child cope with change

SESSION 2

Relevance of attachment theory to
child protection

Relevance of attachment theory to child protection

- There is an established link between attachment and child protection
- Some researchers have suggested that 80% of maltreated children display insecure attachment reactions and behaviours (Howe et al, 1999).

Why do maltreated children develop insecure attachment patterns?

- The nature of care giving environment
- Could be chaotic, disorganised and inconsistent
- Little opportunity to perceive themselves as special and worthy

Children adapt

- Children adapt to their particular care-giving environment
- Learn that specific types of behaviour and strategies are more likely to elicit a caregiver response
- Child's aim is to have his/her needs met

Multiple factors

- Particular types of abuse can interact with attachment.
- Interaction can be harming – e.g. domestic violence
- Interaction can be mitigating – e.g. resilience effect – sexual abuse

Effects

- Insecure attachment – biological impacts on the child - problems with stress, biochemical and hormone regulation
- Can increase the risk of intergenerational transmission
- Severe attachment difficulties can lead to a number of mental health problems and disorders.
- Severe reactions do not just result from abuse and neglect

Summary

- Young children develop strategies to help them cope with, survive, and function in, whatever caregiving environment they are in, including ones in which there is abuse and neglect
- These strategies may be functional in adverse caregiving environments but they may lead to a variety of developmental impairments and failure to develop social competence

SESSION 3

Facilitating attachment

Facilitating attachment

- Many children or young people requiring care could be displaying a range of behaviours resulting from: the nature of their caregiving environment, their attachment relationship, the harms they are presenting, and other environmental, parental and child factors.

Behaviours and reactions

- Anger, aggression, yelling, hitting, pleading, temper tantrums, destructive, clingy
- Attention seeking, demanding, unwilling to explore their environment, bullying of peers, controlling others
- Coercive behaviour, highly compliant, quiet, detached, passive, unresponsive, withdrawn, overly self-contained
- Negative self talk, fearful behaviour, difficulty in perceiving others emotions/reactions, nervous, hypervigilience, difficulty engaging with others and responding to overt care and attention
- Sleep disturbance, nightmares, regressive behaviour, abuse related behaviour (e.g sexualised behaviour)
- Contradictory behaviour - mixture of any of the above

Depends on individual child

- Certain behaviours could be developmentally appropriate
- Likewise, secure and socially competent children can display any of these behaviours at particular times.
- Important to consider the nature, duration, severity and frequency of the behaviour and how this impacts on a child's wellbeing and opportunity for positive interactions and outcomes.
- Carers make vital observations about children and these should be communicated to CSOs or others in the caring network.

Facilitate attachment

- Support and where possible strengthen existing attachment relationships. This could be with biological parents, relatives, friends and siblings.
- A positive relationship with a carer should be maintained. Positive attachment relationships with carers should not discontinue just because a child returns home or moves onto another placement or life situation.
- Attachment and relationship establishment should be a goal for both short-term and long-term placements.
- By developing a positive attachment and creating a care environment that is nurturing and responsive to the child, the carer can help the child to cope with change and move on to new situations

Avoid labelling

- Attachment difficulties may also manifest as behavioural problems in children and adolescents – remember not necessarily an attachment related issue
- Caution needed in relation to attached-based therapies such as: children expressing repressed rage, addressing the arousal-relaxation cycle, holding therapy and others - little research support that they are effective and can be dangerous

Summary

Facilitate the child's social and emotional development:

- Understand the possible reasons for why the child is behaving in inappropriate ways – avoid a 'blame the child' response
- Sustained and consistent interest, affection, care and positive regard for a child's achievements increase resilience
- Nurture and support existing (and pre-care) attachments including to family of origin

SESSION 4

Stability, security and continuity

Permanency planning

- In child protection, the process of ensuring stability and security for children in care is called permanency planning
- This process involves making long-term care arrangements for children with families and individuals that offer lifetime relationships and a sense of belonging

Permanent options

- Permanent options may include preventing unnecessary placements through family preservation; return home ('reunification'); permanent, long-term foster carers or relative carers (with or without guardianship); and adoption
- All of these permanent options have a place

More than placement

- Permanency planning is about *relationships, identity and a sense of belonging*
- Critical aspects: *physical* (safe, stable living environments); *relational* (stable, unconditional emotional connections); and *legal* (officially determined by the child welfare system)
- The relational aspects are most important to children

PP involves considering

- Attachment
- Child development
- Cultural identity formation

Contact

- Important to child's sense of belonging and identity
- Long-term interests of child
- Not only visits – phone calls, cards, emails, photographs, family events
- Not only parents – siblings, cousins, school friends, other extended family etc.
- Importance of preparation for all parties

SESSION 5 - Conclusion

Revisit learning outcomes:

- Know the basics of attachment theory and research
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- Know how to promote stability, security and continuity for children and young people in care

Assessment

- Complete personal reflection and retain
- Complete written assessment and return to trainer

GOODBYE!

Thank you for your participation