

Understanding & Supporting Attachment in the Early Years

*Recognizing attachment difficulties and
supporting healthy attachment relationships*

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Attachment insecurity and attachment disorders

- When babies are not soothed if they feel insecure
- When babies are frightened or confused by their caregivers

Are there signs and signals of risk?

1. Demographics

- Poverty; single parent; multiple young children; children with developmental delays or disabilities; absence of social supports; etc.

These lead to higher stresses for parents.

2. Internal representations

- Histories in the present or in the past of psychiatric disorders, trauma or unresolved losses, substance abuse, domestic violence, abuse, neglect, etc.

These lead to distorted perceptions of and unregulated responses to the baby.

Are there signs and signals of risk?

3. Observations - both parent and baby
 - a. How distressed is the baby?
 - b. How effective is “Mum” at reading the baby’s signals?
 - c. How effective is “Mum” at soothing baby?
 - d. Does “Mum” refer to the baby’s mind?
 - e. Is baby a little cautious of you/ a stranger?
 - f. Does baby turn to strangers for reassurance?

Parental behaviours

- Insensitivity
 - Does not recognize baby's distress
 - Does not respond contingently to baby's distress
 - Cannot find a way to relieve baby's distress
 - Makes misattributions about baby's behaviour, feelings or intentions
 - Seems stressed much of the time

Parental behaviours

- FR behaviours
 - Makes misattributions about baby's behaviour, feelings or intentions
 - Seems stressed much of the time
 - Does not protect the baby from harm/distress
 - Threatens the baby
 - Seems disconnected while with the baby

Intervening to foster adaptive attachment relationships

Knowledge is power

Teach about attachment and what it means

- Feeling secure
- Needs contingent responses
- Better outcomes

Intervening to foster adaptive attachment relationships

- **Reflective functioning** – observing your own and your baby's experience of interaction
 - Listen for mental state words when mother talks about baby
 - Does mother recognize that she cannot know for sure what is going on in baby's mind?
 - Does mother take baby's development into consideration when she tries to understand baby's behaviour?
- **Observe baby together**
- **Talk about baby's mind**
- **Talk about how mother is shaping baby's mind**
- **Educate about infant development**

Intervening to foster adaptive attachment relationships

- Reducing stress
 - Address issues mother has difficulty with
 - Encourage mother to seek other mothers to share time and experiences with
 - Problem solving approach

IDEAS (Sahler et al, 2005)

- Identify the problem and causes of the problem
- Define your options
- Evaluate your options
- Act
- See if it worked

