Attachment in the Classroom

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The Early Years Conference

Vancouver, January 2018

Disclosure of Conflict of Interest

We do not have an affiliation (financial or otherwise) with a pharmaceutical, medical device or communications organization.

Sonya Vellet is a paid trainer for Circle of Security – Parenting©
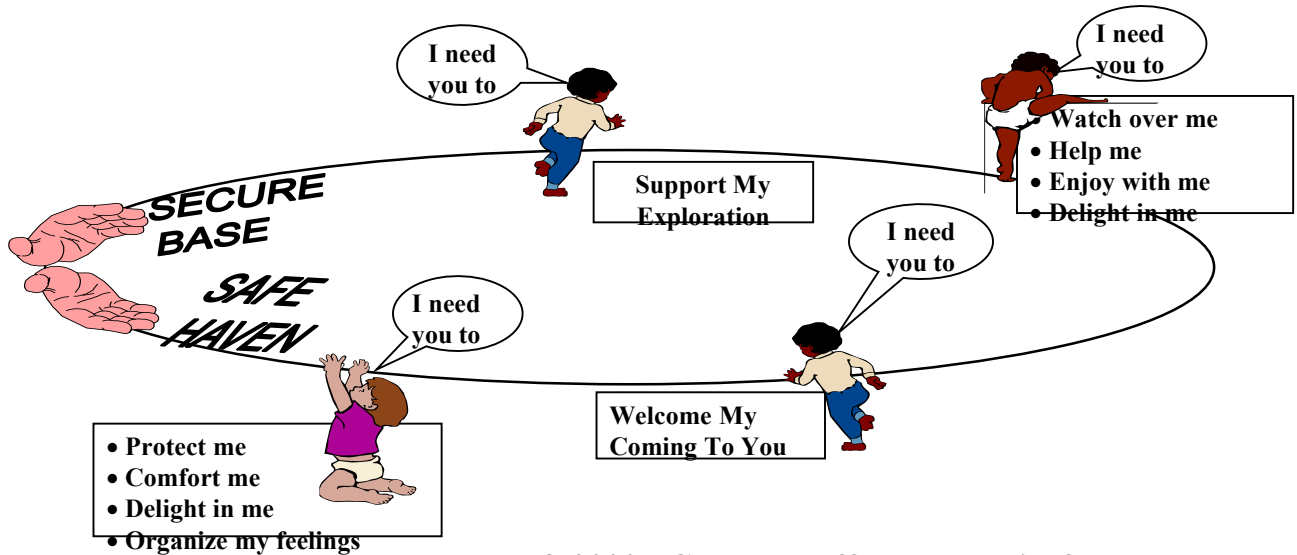
Learning Objectives

- Understand a child's emotional world by learning to read emotional needs.
- Share support strategies to enhance a child's ability to successfully manage emotions.
- Learn about how to enhance the development of a child's self-esteem and self-regulation.
- Honor the innate wisdom and desire for children to have a secure relationship with a caring adult.

■ What does attachment mean to you?

Circle of Security

Parent/caregiver Attending to the Child's Needs

I need you to

SECURE BASE

SAFE HAVEN

Support My Exploration

Welcome My Coming To You

I need you to

I need you to

Watch over me
- Help me
- Enjoy with me
- Delight in me

- Protect me
- Comfort me
- Delight in me
- Organize my feelings

© 2000 - Cooper, Hoffman, Marvin & Powell

BEING WITH

At the heart of developing a
secure attachment
is the knowledge that my caregiver
is emotionally available to
"be with" me
during times of need

A Difference that Makes a Difference
Implications of Attachment Security
(based on 30 years of research):

- Regulation of emotions, attention, and behaviour
- Sense of self (e.g., self-esteem)
- Curiosity and exploration (e.g., approach problem-solving tasks more positively and with greater persistence)
- Cognitive and language competence
- Capacity to relate to others (e.g., more empathic, cooperative, resilient, competent in relationships)
- Optimistic and resilient
- Learn to fear danger
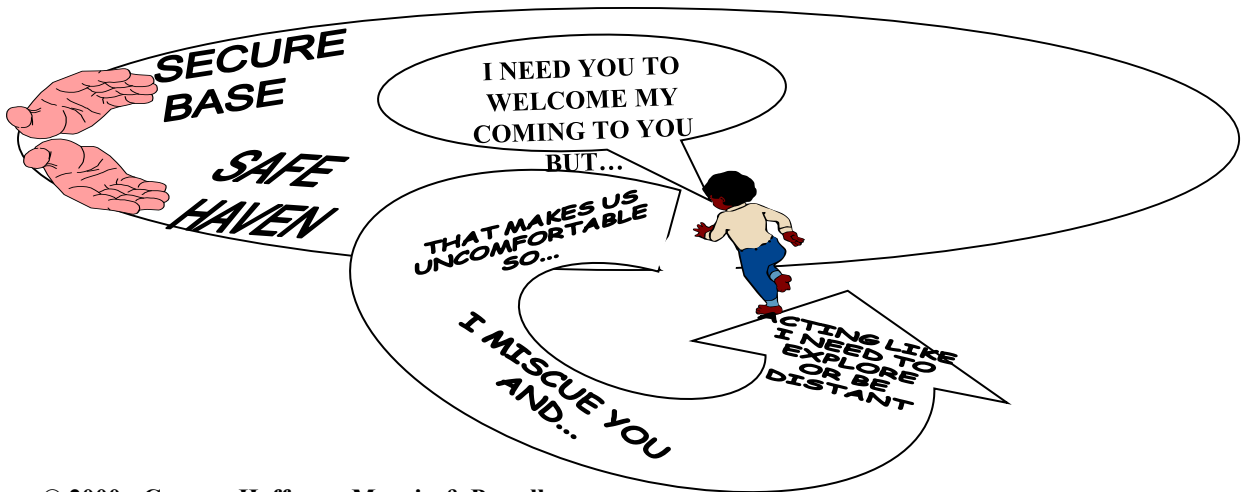- Build capacity to be a secure attachment figure for own children

BEING WITHOUT

At the heart of developing an
insecure attachment
is the knowledge that my caregiver
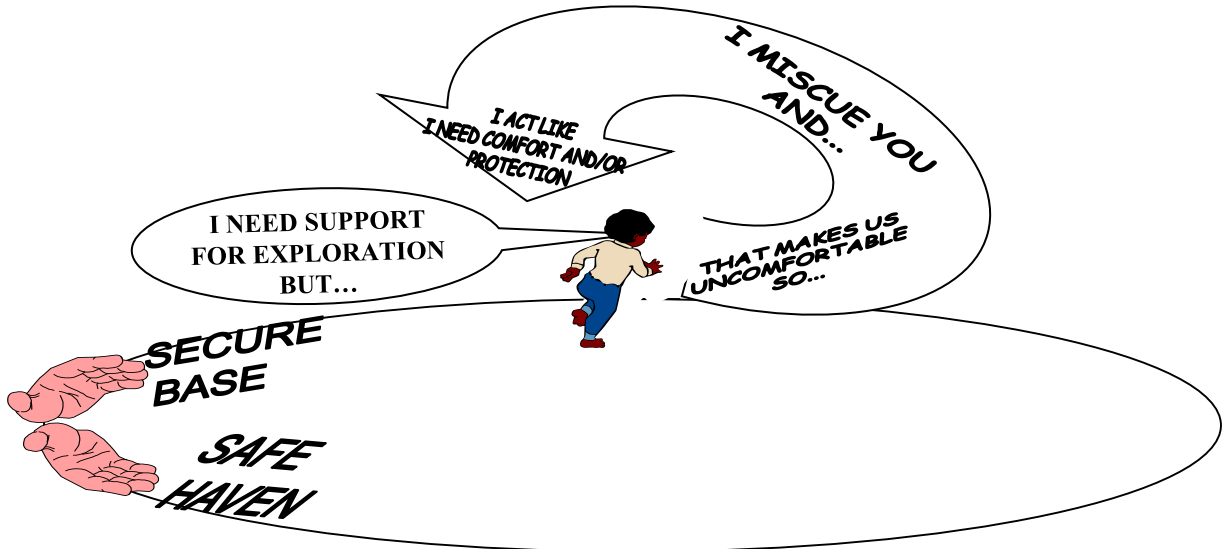is emotionally unavailable to me
during
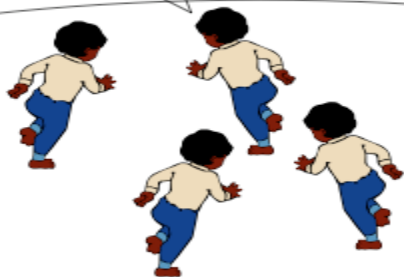times of need

CIRCLE OF LIMITED SECURITY
Child Miscuing

SECURE BASE

SAFE HAVEN

I NEED YOU TO WELCOME MY COMING TO YOU BUT…

THAT MAKES US UNCOMFORTABLE SO…

I MISCUE YOU AND…

ACTING LIKE I NEED TO EXPLORE OR BE DISTANT

Circle of Security Parenting©

- Consistent with attachment theory and research
- Offers key components of COS® within a brief, 8-week parenting programme
- Delivered in a step-by-step process for use in transdisciplinary manner (e.g., IDP, AIDP, SCD, ASCD, OT, SLP, dietician, public health nurse) in groups, home visitation, and individual counselling

Reflective Functioning:
The Path to Secure Attachment

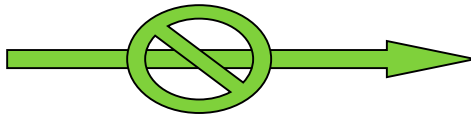"First, I need a map, a way to clearly understand my child's needs." → "I must then learn to stand back, and watch my self and my child." → "The next step is to talk about what I am doing (and not yet doing) to meet my child's needs."

"I want my child to be securely attached."

Secure Attachment

Attachment in the Classroom
Cooper, Hoffman, and Powell (2017)

Designed to enhance teachers' abilities to:

- Form secure relationships
- Overcome obstacles in children's abilities to engage in secure attachment
- Create classrooms that promote security
  - Dual Risk and Compensatory Effect (Howes & Spieker, 2017)

Attachment in the Classroom

- Children have an innate desire to explore when it feels safe to do so.
- Two conditions make it feel safe for exploration; when these *two criteria* are met, children learn easily and freely:
  - Absence of anything frightening
  - Presence of a trusted adult, with whom the child has developed attachment relationship

Attachment in the Classroom

- If these two criteria are **not met**, it is extremely difficult for a child to learn.

- Children learn a wide range of cognitive, social, and emotional skills in JK & SK, including _learning to go to school_ so that in the elementary years they can _go to school to learn_

Attachment between children and teachers: **Key Factors**

- Teacher's *'state of mind'* with respect to attachment (Howes & Spieker, 2017)
- Child's expectations about the availability and responsiveness of adults (based on experiences with their primary caregivers, including teacher)
- Conditions in the moment
- Training for teachers focuses on:
  - Promoting children's literacy and numeric skills
  - Managing challenging behaviours
  - Rather than the children's relationship needs

Attachment in the Classroom: **GOALS**

- **Teachers are encouraged to**:
  - Use an attachment framework as a map to understand the child's relationship needs around the circle;
  - Increase teachers' understanding of secure vs. insecure patterns of attachment
  - Build observational skills

Attachment in the Classroom: **GOALS**

- **Teachers are encouraged to:**
  - Increase their ability to reflect on their own and the child's behaviour, thoughts, and feelings regarding their interactions
  - Increase their ability to reflect on experiences in their own histories that affect current interaction patterns
  - Increase their sensitivity and appropriate responsiveness to the child's signals and needs around the circle

Case Study: Child Profile Sam

Child

- 3 yrs old
- Middle child, sister 8 brother 18 months
- Lives with parents but Dad works two weeks on out of town, one week off
- First group child care experience
- Language delay

Classroom observations

- Limited use of language
- Difficultly following routine
- Challenged to sit at circle time
- Moves around the room
- Limited ability to attend
- Often crying or upset over "small stuff"
- May hit or kick peers or adults
- Often will drop to the ground and "tantrum"

Case study: Child Profile Sam

From an attachment based perspective, what strategies would you recommend for Sam as a classroom teacher?

Attachment in the Classroom: **TOOLS**

- **Teachers are encouraged to:**
  - Use strategies to identify children in your class who are likely struggling with attachment
  - Develop a plan to address the unmet attachment needs of specific children
    - Invisible, difficulty with exploration, seeking comfort when distressed
  - Use Primary groups and Sanctuary Space

Attachment in the Classroom: **TOOLS**

- **Identifying children who are struggling with attachment:**
  - Classroom Sort by Ease of Connection
  - Looking for Invisible Children Inventory

Attachment in the Classroom: **TOOLS**

- Developing a plan to help teacher address the child's unmet needs:

INVISIBLE CHILD

Focus: Child needs to have a sense that the teacher knows him as an individual, accepts him, and is committed to protecting him to keep him safe.

Attachment in the Classroom: **TOOLS**

- Developing a plan to help teacher address the child's unmet needs:

    If child is difficult to connect with because he/ she does not accept or believe that the teacher is willing or able to provide <u>SAFETY</u>:

    Focus:
    - **Bigger, Stronger, Wiser, Kind, and Committed**
    - **Support Exploration**
    - **Follow Need**
    - **Take Charge, when necessary**

Attachment in the Classroom: **TOOLS**

- Developing a plan to help teacher address the child's unmet needs:

  If child is struggling with activation of <u>EXPLORATION</u>:

  Focus: Support exploration by building the child's confidence that the teacher will be available when needed.

Attachment in the Classroom: **TOOLS**

- Developing a plan to help teacher address the child's unmet needs:

  - *If child is struggling to seek a teacher in times of <u>DISTRESS</u>:*

    Focus: Welcoming the child into a relationship that provides protection, comfort, delight, and help in organizing feelings.

Attachment in the Classroom: **TOOLS**

- **Classroom Tools:**
  - *Primary Groups* – children are assigned to one of three teachers and each teacher is assigned a table to use as a gathering place for their primary group (welcome, snack time, circle time, lunch time)
    - Dual Focus (Howes and Spieker, 2016)
  - *Sanctuary Space* – create at least some periods in the day in which outside distractions would be a rare exception to the rule of teachers being available to their students.

Strategies to enhance the attachment relationship

- Become aware of your strengths and vulnerabilities around the circle:
  - Supporting my child's exploration
  - Providing my child with comfort
  - Taking charge (e.g., organizing my child's feelings)
  - Repairing ruptures

Strategies to enhance the attachment relationship

- Provide a predictable interpersonal environment to assist the child in developing the ability to regulate attention, emotions, and behaviour (*):

  - ***Take a break*** (for caregiver, child, or both)

  - ***Time-In and repair routine***:
    - Use empathy and help the child bring words to her/his feelings (i.e., "You look frustrated")
    - Place yourself in the role of a helper and invite the child into collaborative problem-solving (i.e., "I'm here to help, we can work it out together")

Strategies to enhance the attachment relationship:

- Comfort child when upset, hurt, or ill
- Provide nurturance (respond as if…)
- Eliminate frightening and intrusive behaviours
- Help child take charge, when possible
- Follow child's lead in play
- Attend to child's signals, particularly around engagement and disengagement

Strategies to enhance the attachment relationship:

- Help organize child's emotions
- Establish predictable routines
- Let children know where you are going and when you will be back
- Try to be predictable and positive
- Provide regular movement breaks

Strategies to enhance the attachment relationship:

- ***Remember:*** Children will need frequent, repetitive experiences of being understood and accepted, not one breakthrough

Case Study: Child Profile Sam

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-

Case study: Child Profile Sam

From an attachment based perspective, What strategies would you recommend as a classroom teacher?

Support Strategies:

- Create clans – Primary Groups
- Develop an individual goal plan
- Establish predictable routines and expectations
- Create sanctuary space
- Classroom attachment figure to:
  - Help organize feelings
  - Comfort child
  - Play together - ***Time in*** - daily activities to connect
  - Take a break
  - Teacher Self Reflection
  - Positive encouragement

Resources – Websites

- Circle of Security: http://www.circleofsecurity.net/
- Infant Mental Health Promotion (Sick Kids in Toronto): http://www.sickkids.ca/imp/
- Zero to Three: http://www.zerotothree.org/
- National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (Brain Development): www.developingchild.net/pubs/wp/emotional_development_is_built.pdf

References

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Thank You