Session 1.2
Understanding Attachment

This session explains the key points of attachment theory. The video footage (length 20 minutes) covers the key points and these are explained by experts in this field.

Although a lot of the footage you will see refers to babies it is worth explaining to practitioners that understanding attachment theory is relevant and crucial no matter what age range you work with as it forms the underlying building blocks for developing all relationships and how we view the world around us and the people around us, it impacts on our potential for the rest of our lives.

Video footage

Ask practitioners to watch the video footage and jot down any observations under the question prompts they have. You can stop the video at any point to recap on the key points, discuss further or to give a little more time for practitioners to jot down their thoughts. You may prefer to run through all of the video and then take some time to share and recap the key points.

Session 1.2 - Video
Understanding Attachment

What is attachment?

- As John Bowlby, one of the most influential theorists on attachment, stated 'The bond that ties the mother and baby together'
- Special relationship between babies and their main carers that gives baby a feeling of safety and security and knowing that their needs will be met
- It is central to our survival and well-being and so babies are born with in-built behaviours to keep their carer close to them and meeting their needs e.g. crying, grasping, eye contact, facial expression, smiling
- A strong relationship where carer responds quickly and sensitively to baby's needs

Can babies develop more than one attachment?

- Yes. Children form more than one attachment
- Usually mum is the main or primary attachment figure but secondary attachments are made with other close, caring, familiar adults

What does 'tuning in' to babies look like?

- Synchronising responses to baby's cues
- Empathising with baby's emotions
- Putting yourself in to baby's head to work out what they're feeling and needing
- Meeting baby's needs, letting them know you understand them
- Mind mindedness – to understand child's needs from their perspective

What impact do these experiences have on the brain?

- The brain is developing and growing at its fastest in the first 3 years of life
- Experiences shape the brain
- Through experiences brain connections are made
- Connections not used are pruned away
- Regular experiences result in longer lasting, stronger brain connections
- Regular experiences help baby make sense of the world around them

How do babies begin to make sense of their emotions?

- Babies can't manage or make sense of their emotions for themselves at first, they need adult carers to do this for them
- If carer regularly responds quickly and sensitively to meet baby's needs, they get used to having their emotions regulated for them. This helps baby begin to develop emotional regulation, so that baby can begin to manage their own emotions in time
- How carers respond to baby's needs, shapes the developing brain, programming how they will react and respond to stress in the future

What happens if a child doesn't receive responsive, sensitive & consistent care?

- 60-65% of children are naturally securely attached
- There are two common types of insecure attachment: Avoidant and Anxious attachments

- Avoidant attachment – where the carers have discouraged showing emotions, haven't modelled emotions and how to deal with them - resulting in suppression of emotions and inhibition
- Anxious attachment – where the carer's responses have been inconsistent and perhaps not what the child has needed. This results in attention-seeking behaviour (good or bad) by the child, as they can't know what response they will get - they're desperate to keep the carer near and watching them - so that they might get what they need
- A child who is insecurely attached can't trust that things will be sorted out for them and so will find it more difficult to regulate their own stress.

Note!

It is really helpful to be aware of the different types of attachment relationships as this can help us to understand perhaps why some children react and respond differently and how we can support them better. However as this is a complex subject and this explanation of types of attachment, has been simplified, it is not advisable for practitioners to try and 'label' or 'classify' children in attachment terms.

Reflection

- How do these significant aspects relate to the role of the key person?
- In what ways can attachment theory help us in our daily practice with children?

Possible thoughts might be: *To understand why children get so upset when*

parent leaves - why babies cry - shows us different ways that babies and young children try to communicate - understand how much our key children need us to be there for them - think about how we can give children more individual time - understanding the importance of tuning in to children - understanding why some children behave differently or seem to need more attention

- In what ways do you support children's growing secondary attachments to you and colleagues?

- What can I do to help my key children to make sense of their emotions?

Possible thoughts might be: *Tune in to them - meet their needs and put things right - recognise and empathise with what they're feeling - give them time to go through their emotion - provide comfort for them when they're distressed - with older children: talk about emotions and how we feel - use stories - be understanding of their emotions - discuss how others might feel*

- What can I do in my daily practice, to support the relationship experiences of my key children with their primary and secondary attachment figures?

Possible thoughts might be: *Try to ensure some one to one time every day with key children - be available as much as possible for my key children - be comforting and loving - be sensitive to their feelings, needs and emotions - be responsive to their needs - accept that they each have different feelings and experiences and try to tune in to understand each of my key children - build good two way relationship with parents*

- Children at your setting may have insecure attachment relationships? What might this mean for the key person's relationship with children and their parents/carers?

Action to be taken

At this point it might be useful to share thoughts from the reflection questions as a group. These could be recorded on flipchart and used as actions to be taken for each room/ group/setting as a whole.

- Are there any issues that need addressing as an individual or as a team? Could you make time to do observations in your own setting?

- In your role as key person do you have children in your group whose insecure attachment causes you concern?

- Do you know where to seek help and guidance from to decide how best to support individual children?