

Developing a Loving and Trusting Relationship with your Child

Why is it important to develop a loving and trusting relationship with your child?

- Is it for your emotions? Is it for their immediate pleasure?
- Child develops schema of the world based on your interaction with them.
 - The interactions you have become the blueprint for future relationships and interactions.
 - The messages you convey, become internalized.
- Never withhold love. Parents sometimes confuse their love for codependency and their own emotional needs.
- The cornerstones of a strong parent-child bond:
 - **Love and Affection:** Focus on physical touch, positive words of affirmation, and quality time spent together (cuddles, bedtime stories, etc.).
 - **Communication:** Active listening techniques (giving full attention, validating feelings, avoid interrupting), open communication (encouraging children to share freely, such as if they have a bathroom accident), and "I" statements for addressing misbehavior.
 - **Trust:** Consistency and follow-through: When you say you'll do something, do it. This builds trust and predictability for your child. Reliability: Be there for your child, both physically and emotionally.

Projective Internalizations:

- Projective internalization is a concept in Jungian psychology where a child unconsciously projects their inner experiences (thoughts, feelings) onto the external world, particularly onto their caregivers.
- These projections shape the child's internal world, forming the foundation of their psyche and influencing their perception of themselves and others.
- Secure Attachment and Healthy Projections:
 - When parents provide consistent love, warmth, and responsiveness, it fosters a sense of security in the child.
 - The child internalizes this positive experience, projecting onto the world as a safe and trustworthy place.
- Insecure Attachment and Distorted Projections:

- Inconsistent or neglectful parenting can create feelings of anxiety, fear, or anger in the child.
- These negative emotions are then projected outwards, shaping the child's internal world and potentially leading to distorted views of themselves and others.
- For example, a child who experiences frequent frustration might project this onto the world, seeing it as a hostile place. This can lead to the internalization of negative archetypes like the Terrible Mother (destructive, threatening) or the Trickster (deceptive, manipulative).

An archetype, in its simplest definition, is a universal symbol or pattern that appears across cultures and stories. It's like a basic building block of human understanding.

Building Trust and the "Good Father" Archetype:

- A toddler consistently experiences their father as reliable and supportive.
- The father keeps his promises, helps the child feel safe and secure, and celebrates their achievements.
- Through this positive experience, the child internalizes a sense of trust and predictability in the world.
- This can lead to the projection of the "Good Father" archetype onto the world.
- The "Good Father" archetype represents qualities like reliability, fairness, and guidance.
- By internalizing this archetype, the child develops a sense of inner strength, confidence in their ability to explore and learn, and a belief that the world can be a supportive place.

The Nurturing Embrace of the "Good Mother":

- Imagine a toddler who receives consistent love and affection from their mother.
- The mother provides a safe haven for the child to express their emotions, offers comfort when they're upset, and celebrates their joys.
- Through this nurturing experience, the child internalizes a sense of security and self-worth.
- This can lead to the projection of the "Good Mother" archetype onto the world.
- The "Good Mother" archetype embodies qualities like unconditional love, empathy, and compassion.
- By internalizing these qualities, the child develops a strong sense of self-love, feels comfortable expressing their needs and emotions, and learns to be empathetic towards others.

Inconsistent or neglectful parenting can indeed create negative emotions in a child, and the terms fear and anxiety are often used interchangeably, but there are subtle differences:

Fear:

- Fear, in this context, would be a more immediate and specific emotional response to a perceived threat from the caregiver's behavior.
- For example, a toddler might feel **fear** of abandonment if their caregiver leaves them unexpectedly.
- Fear serves an evolutionary purpose, triggering the fight-or-flight response to keep us safe from immediate danger.

Anxiety:

- Anxiety, from a Jungian viewpoint, is more diffuse and long-lasting.
- It's a general feeling of unease or apprehension that stems from the child's **uncertain** environment due to inconsistent parenting.
- The child might not know what to expect from their caregiver, leading to a chronic state of worry and nervousness.
- This anxiety can then be projected outwards, making the world seem like a more unpredictable and threatening place.

What does the science say about that?

Brain Development: Studies show that strong parent-child bonds positively impact brain development in children, leading to better emotional regulation, social skills, and cognitive function.

- **Stress Response:** Studies show that children with secure attachments have a better-regulated stress response system. This means they are better able to manage cortisol levels, a stress hormone, leading to calmer and more focused brains [Source: National Scientific Council on the Developing Child].
- **Hippocampal Growth:** Secure attachment has been linked to increased growth in the hippocampus, a brain region crucial for learning and memory [Source: "Early Experience and Human Development: Lessons from Attachment Research" by Charles H. Zeanah, Child Development, 2009].
- **Prefrontal Cortex Development:** Research suggests that secure attachment supports the development of the prefrontal cortex, which plays a vital role in executive function skills like planning, decision-making, and impulse control [Source: "The Neurobiology of Attachment" by Bruce Perry and Daniel J. Siegel, Neurobiology of Interpersonal Relationships, 2005].

Academic Achievement: Research suggests that children with secure attachments to their parents tend to perform better in school.

- **Improved Attention:** Children with secure attachments tend to have better attention spans and focus in the classroom, leading to improved academic performance [Source: "The Influence of Attachment Types on Academic Performance of Children" by Konstantinos Fotevopoulos et al., Atlantis Press, 2013].
- **Motivation and Engagement:** Securely attached children are more likely to be motivated and engaged in learning activities, leading to better academic outcomes [Source: "The Importance of Attachment in Early Child Development" by Florida Tech Online Degrees, 2023].
- **Positive Relationships with Teachers:** Secure attachment styles are linked to stronger relationships with teachers, which can further support academic success [Source: Journal of Educational Psychology].

Mental Health: Strong parent-child relationships can act as a buffer against anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges in children.

- **Reduced Anxiety and Depression:** Children with secure attachments are less likely to experience anxiety and depression later in life [Source: American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry].
- **Emotional Regulation:** Secure attachment equips children with better emotional regulation skills, allowing them to cope with challenges in a healthy way [Source: National Scientific Council on the Developing Child].
- **Resilience:** Secure attachment fosters resilience, the ability to bounce back from setbacks and adversity [Source: "The Importance of Attachment in Early Child Development" by Florida Tech Online Degrees, 2023].

The Roots of Trust: Attachment Styles

We all have a natural desire for connection, and this is especially true for young children. The quality of their early relationships with caregivers shapes their **attachment style**, which is basically a blueprint for how they approach close relationships throughout life.

There are different attachment styles, but the most important distinction for us today is **secure vs. insecure attachment**. Securely attached children learn to trust that their needs will be met and that their caregiver is a safe haven they can return to after exploring the world. Insecure attachment can develop if a child's needs are inconsistently met, leading to feelings of anxiety or avoidance in relationships.

The good news is that even if a child's earliest experiences weren't ideal, we as caregivers can still foster a secure attachment by providing consistent love, warmth, and responsiveness.

- **Anxious-Preoccupied Attachment:** These children crave closeness and attention but often worry they won't receive it. They might cling to caregivers, be easily upset by separation, and show high levels of anxiety about relationships.
- **Avoidant-Dismissive Attachment:** Children with this style tend to push away intimacy and downplay the importance of closeness. They might appear self-sufficient but may struggle with forming deep connections or expressing vulnerability.
- **Disorganized-Disoriented Attachment:** This is the least common style and arises from unpredictable or frightening experiences with caregivers. Children may show a mix of behaviors, wanting closeness but then becoming fearful or angry when it's offered.

How do we do it?

- Parents sometimes don't "feel" like they're doing enough or doing it right.
- Parents sometimes don't "trust" that what they're doing is working.
- It's common to end the night and feel so deflated that maybe you didn't do enough today.

Interventions:

- Reflect on your day and highlight everything that you did with your child without minimizing.
- Check-in with yourself frequently to see if you're present or if you're lost in your thoughts when with your child.
- Short bursts of quality time (i.e. hot hands, high fives, quick playful jokes, etc.)
- Smile and show excitement when you see them because they then believe that they matter and are worth something!
- Make eye contact, manage your facial expressions and smile!, and tell them something amazing about them or something you love about them.
- **Love:** Cuddle time, bedtime stories, saying "I love you" often.
- **Communication:** Mealtimes as a family for conversation, taking turns choosing activities.
- **Trust:** Reading books about emotions together, creating a "worry box" for children to anonymously share concerns.
- **Active Listening:** When your child is upset, avoid minimizing their feelings. Instead, try saying, "It sounds like you're feeling frustrated. Can you tell me more about what's bothering you?"
- **"I" Statements:** When addressing misbehavior, use "I" statements to communicate your feelings. For example, "I feel frustrated when toys are left on the floor. Can we put them away together?"
- **Open-Ended Questions:** Instead of yes/no questions, ask open-ended questions like, "What was your favorite part of the day?" or "How can we solve this problem together?"