

UNDERSTANDING ATTACHMENT

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What is attachment?

The clinical concept of attachment refers to the quality of the relationship between a child and her caregiver. (This is different from the style of parenting known as 'attachment parenting').

The importance of secure relationships:

The security of your relationships with children has a big impact on several long term developmental outcomes, including:

- brain development
- self-esteem
- resilience
- presence or absence of behavioural difficulties
- school readiness, learning and long-term academic outcomes
- quality of relationships with friends, family and eventually romantic partners

How does a child develop a secure attachment style?

When your child has a secure relationship with you, she is able to use you as a secure base from which to venture out, explore her environment and learn about the world and her place in it.

She is also able to return to you as her safe haven if she needs comfort, protection or help calming down when she's feeling overwhelmed. There will also be times when your child will come to you just to reconnect and recharge.

Of course, there are differences in how far and how independently children will venture out and in how often they will need to return to you. These differences will depend on the age of your child, her temperament and even what sort of a day she's having. The key to building a secure relationship with your child is supporting her individual need to venture out and explore (provided it's safe to do so), as well as her need to return to you, as often as you can.

When your child feels like she has your support to both explore and to return, she becomes more secure, confident and independent. This is particularly useful to remember for those children who tend to cling nervously. It might be tempting to push them further than they're comfortable and to discourage their closeness, but when children are not confident that we will welcome them back to us, they can become more reluctant to venture out.



One of the keys to raising confident, capable children is responding to their individual needs, rather than to our own.

To find out more about Dr Kaylene Henderson and her popular resources, go to: www.drkaylenehenderson.com. Or to download her online Advice Packs on a range of topics such as anxiety, resilience, school readiness and tantrums, head to A Dose of Awesomeness: www.adoseofawesomeness.com.