

**Affect Regulation &  
the Role of Early Attachment:  
Developmental context for considering post  
separation parenting arrangements**



**Jennifer McIntosh Ph.D.  
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Canberra**

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**Infancy: A Critical Developmental Period**

- Infancy (first 3-4 years) is a time of developmental vulnerability: rapid physical, cognitive, language, social and emotional development
- the laying down of specific neurological foundations through the attachment relationships



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**Allan Schore  
Interview Extract**

Professor of Neuropsychology  
University of California, Los Angeles

University of Pittsburgh, Ph.D.

Areas of Interest:  
Neuropsychology, developmental psychology,  
attachment theory, infant mental health,  
psychoanalysis, psychotherapy, behavioural biology

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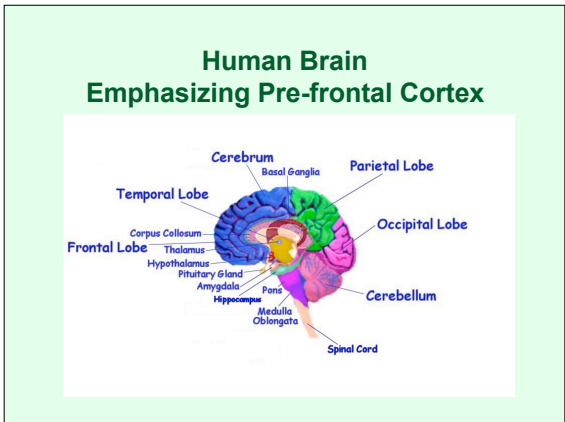
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**Attachment Theory**

- Ethological framework for understanding the psycho-emotional survival and well-being of the human being
- Hard-wired, primitive, complex, innate biological system in humans
- 3<sup>rd</sup> trimester - 24 mths: period of greatest synaptic activity
- 24 mths - 4 yrs: Period of intense consolidation



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**Attachment Security:**

Degree of confidence infant has in responsiveness of care-giver



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## Alan Sroufe Interview Extract

Professor Child Psychology  
Institute of Child Development, University of Minnesota

University of Wisconsin, Ph.D. (Clinical Psychology)

Areas of Interest:  
Socioemotional development, developmental  
psychopathology

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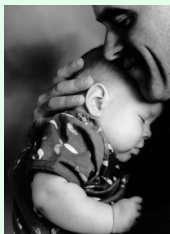
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## Attachment Style:

Way of describing the strategy infant adopts in  
the face of parent's care-giving style



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## Disorganised Attachment

- Pattern of conflicted and contradictory behaviour by infant when they are seeking a care-taking response from a parent
- Parent in disorganized partnership has not developed capacity to provide, *or for systemic reasons cannot currently provide*, organized and timely nurturing at critical junctures of need when the infant's attachment system is highly activated:
  - Fear states, anxiety, confusion, illness, fatigue, and other forms of being overwhelmed

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**Daniel Siegel  
Interview Extract**

Psychiatrist  
Executive Director, Mindsight Institute  
Harvard University, M.D.

Areas of Interest:

Interpersonal Neurobiology, pediatrics, child,  
adolescent and adult psychiatry.

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**Daniel Siegel**

9 brain functions dependent upon attachment  
experience:

1. Body balance and regulation of the heart
2. Attuning to others
3. Balancing/regulating emotions
4. Ability to extinguish fear
5. Response flexibility
6. Insight into oneself
7. Empathy: "feeling with"
8. Morality
9. Intuition

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**The Minnesota Longitudinal Study**

- The 30-year study of high risk infants
- Mapped antecedents of children's developmental outcomes, particularly, the growing ability to self-regulate their emotions, attention and behaviour



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**Early Infancy &  
The Primary Care Relationship**

- Sroufe et al (2006) found that the primary care-giving relationship (or primary attachment) was a **co-regulating relationship**:
- The parent of a young infant (first 18 months) acted primarily to regulate, stabilize and make sense of infant's emotions and needs

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**Late Infancy  
(18mths - 3yrs)**

- Period of "guided self-regulation"
- Attachment figures function to create safe, predictable emotional environment in which to begin increasing:
  1. Autonomy
  2. Awareness of self and others
  3. Standards of behaviour
  4. Awareness of and management of emotional states

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**Pre-school Years  
(3-5yrs)**

- Consolidation of self-regulation
- Behaviours strongly associated with early attachment security (Minnesota longitudinal study):
  - Help-seeking                      -Agency
  - Enthusiasm                        -Flexible self-management
  - Persistence                        -Empathy
  - Compliance                       -Social skills
  - Frustration tolerance          -Popularity
  - Curiosity

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**Early Infancy As Co-regulated Phase  
of Psycho-emotional Development**

- Attachment relationship becomes the matrix within which the young child's cognitive, emotional and social potentials are first organized

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**Primary Role of Parent:**

Provide continuous, predictable relationship through which infant is enabled to survive and thrive psychologically



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**Core Tasks of Parenting Across  
Pre-school Years**

- Regulation of arousal
- Appropriately modulated stimulation
- Provision of secure base and safe haven
- Appropriate guidance, limits and structure
- Maintenance of parent-child boundaries
- Socialization of emotional expression and containment
- Scaffolding for problem solving
- Supporting mastery and achievement
- Supporting the child's contacts with the broader social world
- Accepting the child's growing independence

*Minnesota Longitudinal Study*

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### Continuity of Outcomes over Childhood

- Attachment patterns laid down in early infancy were significantly predictive of a number of connected outcomes in later childhood and adolescence
  - Particularly those associated with growth of self-regulation in the face of social and familial adversity



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### Contextual Risk

“When ecological circumstances were especially undermining of developmental well-being, even secure attachment did not always function to protect the child’s well-being, and it was a history of insecure-avoidant attachment that proved especially undermining of competent functioning, at least at 3 years of age.”

*Belsky & Fearon (2002)*

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### Impacts of Divorce on Core Developmental Tasks

Researchers like Amato and Cherlin have demonstrated that even within a supportive care-giving environment, independent impacts that separation bring to bear on children’s development remain notable



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**Impacts of Divorce on Core Developmental Tasks 2**

- Any factors that compromise a parent's mindfulness about their developing child need to be understood in context of their ability to confound the child's core psycho-developmental tasks (McIntosh, 2003)
- When separation co-occurs with other risks, greater developmental impact is evident

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**Stage Salient Developmental Tasks Vulnerable to Family Stress**

1. Development of core trust and understanding of cause and effect
2. Development of attachment
3. Emotional arousal and regulation of affect
4. Development of internalised beliefs about the self
5. Establishment of peer relationships
6. Adaptation to school and academic achievement

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**Does Shared Care Benefit Children?**  
An Empirical Question

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**A Current LSAC Study**

Kelaheer (Melb Uni)  
McIntosh (La Trobe Uni)  
Smyth (ANU)

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**The Research Questions**

1. Does shared parenting differentially impact parent's capacity for secure base parenting?
2. Does shared parenting differentially impact infant's/child's growing ability to self-regulate emotions and behaviours?
3. Does shared parenting differentially impact infant's/child's physical and psycho-social health status?
4. Does shared parenting impact infant's/child's capacity to focus, attend and learn?
5. Are different thresholds of time-sharing associated with varying degrees of infants and young children?
6. What moderates any relationships between care-pattern and the above outcomes?
7. What cumulative impacts are evident over time of various care patterns?

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**Take Home Message from Attachment Researchers:**

On infants staying away from their primary caregiver

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**“When is regular overnight sharing of younger children ok?”  
Guidelines from Attachment and Developmental Theory**

Once the child:

- has adequate receptive and expressive language
- is capable of representational thought and anticipation
- knows what “tomorrow” is
- experiences the second parent as an attentive and responsive care-giver

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**“When is overnight sharing of younger children ok?”  
Guidelines from Attachment and Developmental Theory**

When overnight time with each parent *supports* the developmental of the pre-schooler

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**Winnicott’s Good-Enough Parent**

- A care-giver whose psychological understanding of infant is adequately complex and their responsiveness adequately sensitive:
  - Ability to integrate their own experiences of trauma
  - Ability to offer the baby “right brain” nurture
  - Clear understanding of why infants are needy
  - Clear role definition: “I am there to meet the baby’s needs”
  - Accurate reading of child’s cues
  - Responsiveness to child’s signals; consistently sensitive and prompt
  - When they are capable of supportive, emotionally resonant communication with the child
  - When they can repair ruptures to attunement
  - When they can warmly reassure the child about the other parent
  - When they genuinely have time to spend with the child
  - When arrangements are “road tests”, responsive to the changing needs of the child

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### Winnicott's Good-Enough Parent

1. Ability to integrate their own experiences of trauma
2. Ability to offer the baby "right brain" nurture
3. Clear understanding of why infants are needy
4. Clear role definition: "I am there to meet the baby's needs"
5. Accurate reading of child's cues
6. Responsiveness to child's signals; consistently sensitive and prompt
7. Supportive, emotionally resonant communication with the child
8. Repair ruptures to attunement
9. Warmly reassure the child about the other parent
10. Genuinely have time to spend with the child
11. Willing to "road test" arrangements and adapt to the changing needs of the child

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### Gender of the Primary Parent?

- In what aspects of infant development might this make a difference?
- Another empirical question.

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### Theory does not make law



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