



# Attachment and Social Development

Health Psychology (CMED2006)

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# Learning Objectives

At the end of the lecture, student should be able to

- Differentiate between Ainsworth's different types of attachment
- Describe the four main types of sociometric status (peer relation) in children
- Describe how ego-centrism manifests in children and adolescence
- Explain how theory of mind (or lack thereof) affects people's behaviour



## Part 1

# Attachment and a “Strange Situation”





# Introduction

We are born in the physical world, and have physical and physiological needs

However, what makes us human is mostly the social aspects

We started to develop relationships with other people even before we were born



| Name of Stage / Conflict (Age)             | Virtue            | Developmental task                                              |
|--------------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Trust vs Mistrust (0-1)</i>             | <i>Hope</i>       | <i>Develop close relationship with mother</i>                   |
| <i>Autonomy vs Shame &amp; Doubt (1-3)</i> | <i>Will</i>       | <i>Make one's own decision</i>                                  |
| <i>Initiative vs Guilt (3-6)</i>           | <i>Purpose</i>    | <i>Imagine and try who one will be</i>                          |
| <i>Industry vs Inferiority (6-12)</i>      | <i>Competency</i> | <i>Learn at school and develop a sense of competence</i>        |
| <i>Identity vs Ego Diffusion (12-19)</i>   | <i>Fidelity</i>   | <i>Search for identity</i>                                      |
| <i>Intimacy vs Isolation (20-40)</i>       | <i>Love</i>       | <i>Develop intimate Relationships</i>                           |
| <i>Generativity vs Stagnation (40-65)</i>  | <i>Care</i>       | <i>Concerns for welfare of next generation and society</i>      |
| <i>Integrity vs Despair (65-death)</i>     | <i>Wisdom</i>     | <i>Look back at one's life and accept what one has achieved</i> |



# Attachment

Strong affectional tie we feel towards the significant people in our lives

Pleasure & comfort

Bond between infants & caregivers





# Significance of Attachment

Innate ability to keep the caregiver nearby

Evolved response that promotes survival

Future loving and positive relationships with others in  
adulthood



# John Bowlby

John Bowlby proposed that children form emotional attachment to their caregivers from 6 months

However, if the caregiver is insensitive or unresponsive, attachment cannot be formed, which leads to future problems





# Mary Ainsworth & Strange Situation

A procedure devised by Mary Ainsworth to observe how a child behave with or without their mother in different situations

A total of 8 situations in fixed order



# 8 Steps of Strange Situation

1. With the mother
2. With the mother and a stranger
3. **Alone with the stranger**
4. Completely alone for a few minutes
5. **Reunited with the mother**
6. Alone again
7. With the stranger again
8. Reunited with the mother



# Before Watching the Video

1. Imagine a normal, typical child
2. How do you think they would behave if they are put through these eight steps?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QTsewNrHUHU>





## Part 2

# Anxieties & Attachment Styles



# Attachment & Anxiety

Children form attachment with their caregiver (mostly their mother) from a very early age – and might be distressed if separated from them

Children also prefer mother to strangers

However, there are also individual differences between children



# Separation Anxiety

Distress and accompanying crying and tantrums that occur when children are separated from or anticipate separation from an individual to whom they are attached

Begins at 10 months, peaks at 13-18 months, diminishes after 24 months






# Stranger Anxiety

Sense of fear of strangers after specific attachment emerges at about the age of 7 months

No fear of strangers before ~7 months



| Age   | Characteristics                                                                                                                                                   |
|-------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 0-2m  | Infant shows no preference among caregivers; use built-in signals (grasp, smiling, crying) to have contact with others                                            |
| 2-7m  | Infant shows increasing preference for most familiar and responsive individuals                                                                                   |
| 7-24m | Infant uses the familiar caregiver as a secure base from which to explore; may display separation anxiety and stranger anxiety                                    |
| 24m+  | Infant understands some of the factors that influence the parent's coming and going and to predict their return; can increasingly tolerate short parental absence |



# Individual Differences

In the previous video of “Strange Situations”, we observed a common response of a children being put through the 8 steps

However, not every child would behave in the same way

According to how they behave, we can categorise their attachment style (with their mother) into 1 of 4 styles





# I. Secure Attachment

Use the parent as a secure base, prefers parent to stranger

Distressed (usually cries) if separated

When the parent returns, actively seek contact with the parent;  
crying is reduced immediately after making contact



## II. Avoidant Attachment

React to strangers in much the same way as the parent (i.e., do not prefer parent over strangers)

Unresponsive to parent's presence; not distressed upon their departure

During reunion, avoid the parent or slow to greet the parent



### III. Resistant Attachment

Seek closeness to the parent; sometimes too clingy and do not want to be away from parent

Distressed when the parent leaves

Angry and resistive on the parent's return and continue to cry





## IV. Disorganized Attachment

Confused and contradictory behaviours

For example, look away when being held by parents; flat, depressed emotion towards parents

Less defined than the other 3 types (sometimes anything that cannot be described as the other 3 types are labelled disorganized attachment)



# Causes of Attachment Styles

In general, mothers who are sensitive to their children's needs  
(and not overly protective) result in secure attachment

In general, mothers who are insensitive to their children's needs  
result in avoidant attachment



# Implications of Attachment Style

A child's attachment style to their mother might also become their default attachment style to other people even after they grew up

E.g. secure, avoidant, resistant or disorganized attachment to their spouse or loved ones





## Tool 68: Separation Anxiety

A baby's distress might be explained by them being separated by their main carer (usually the mother)

Whether the baby has separation anxiety and what happen when the mother (or main carer) returns depend on the Attachment Style



## Tool 69: Stranger Anxiety

A baby's distress might be explained by them being held by (or close to) a stranger



## Tool 70: Attachment Style

A baby's distress and behaviour when i) they are with their mother; ii) the mother leaves; and iii) the mother returns depends on whether their attachment style is secure, avoidant, resistant, or disorganized

This might also be carried into adulthood – in other words, an adult's distress and behaviour can be explained by their attachment style to their loved ones





# Part 3

## Child with Peers



# Introduction

In the first few years of our lives, we spend the vast majority of our time with our family

But eventually, we need to interact and develop relationship with the wider world – this takes new skills, because we cannot interact with everyone as if we are interacting with our parents (or even siblings)



# Play

Play is an important part of children's life

There are different definitions of play, but it is generally activities that are (i) self-initiated and (ii) for fun

The form of play depends on children's personality, but also abilities (e.g., physical and language)





# Types of Play (Pre-schoolers and beyond)

| <u>Play</u>      | <u>Description</u>                                                                            |
|------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Nonsocial play   | Unoccupied, onlooker behaviour & solitary play                                                |
| Parallel play    | A child plays near other children with similar materials but does not try to influence others |
| Associative play | Children engage in separate activities but exchange toys and comment on each other            |
| Cooperative play | Children orient toward a common goal, e.g. Make-believe play, sociodramatic play              |



# Peer Groups

Peer groups are collectives with unique values and standards for behaviours and a social structure of leaders and followers

By the end of middle childhood: strong desire for group belongings



# Friendship

Mutually agreed-on relationship in which children:

- i) Like each other's personal qualities
- ii) Respond to each other's needs and desire





# Organization of Peer Groups

Peer groups are usually organized on

- i) Proximity (e.g. neighbourhood, sitting nearby); and
- ii) Similarity (e.g. gender, age, popularity, academic achievement)



# Peer Acceptance

The extent to which a child is viewed by a group of age-mates as a worthy social partner

If you ask members of a group of children (e.g. a class) to rate other children...



# Types of Peer Acceptance

1. Popular children (widely liked)
2. Rejected children (actively disliked)
3. Controversial children (both liked and disliked)
4. Neglected children (seldom rated by peers)





# Neglected Children

Low rates of interaction and considered shy by classmates

Well-adjusted and socially-skilled as average children

Do not report feeling especially lonely or unhappy

Might still have as many friends as popular children



# Rejected Children

Generally few friends, some have none

Severe adjustment difficulties

Decline in classroom participation, feeling of loneliness, lower academic achievement, avoidance of school



# Helping Rejected Children

May result from a poor fit of child's temperament and parenting practices → can benefit from training of parenting skills

Training on positive skills, perspective-taking and solving social problems





## Tool 71: Types of Play

A person's style of play can be described as either nonsocial, parallel, associative, or cooperative

The style of play a person engage in depends on circumstances and personality, but also abilities (e.g. language) and social skills



## Tool 72: Peer Acceptance

A child's interaction with their peer group can be described as either popular, rejected, controversial, or neglected

Rejected children are more likely to have severe adjustment difficulties, and might benefit from more training in social skills



## Part 4

# Egocentrism in Children & Adolescents





# Ability to Socialize

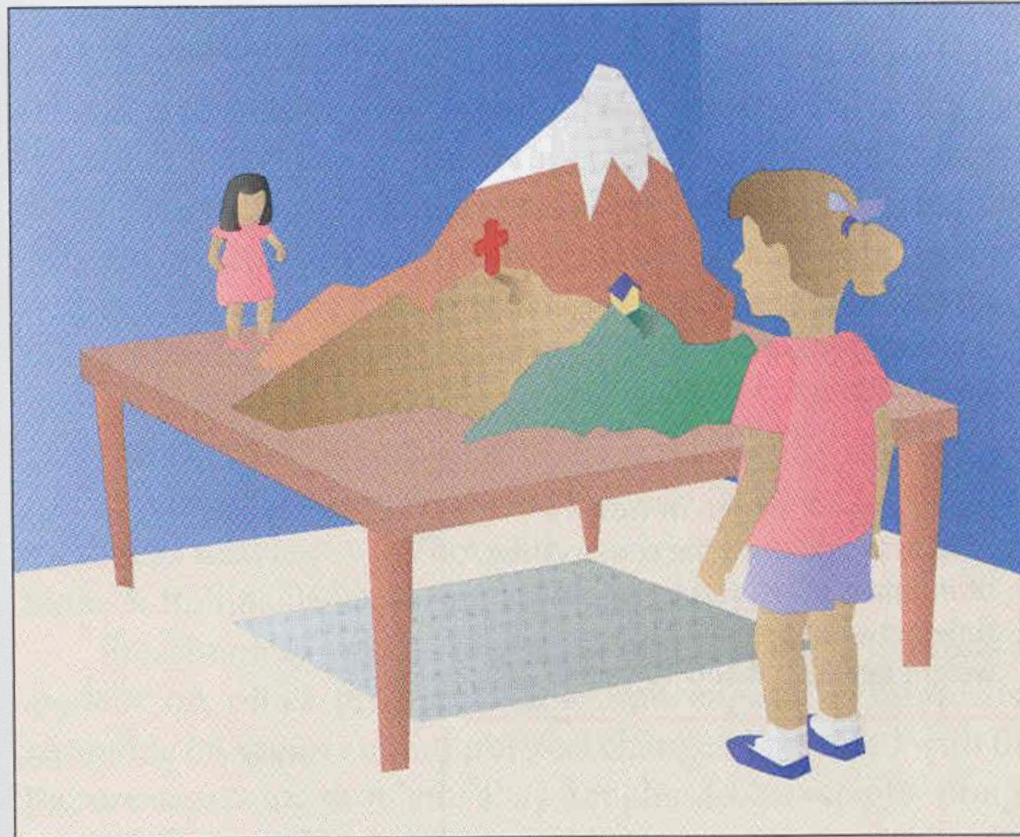
In order to be able to socialize with other people, it is useful to

- i) Know that other people exist
- ii) Communicate with them (verbally or otherwise)
- iii) Have a sense of what other people are thinking, feeling, sensing, or doing

Being self-centred (ego-centric) is a hindrance to socialization



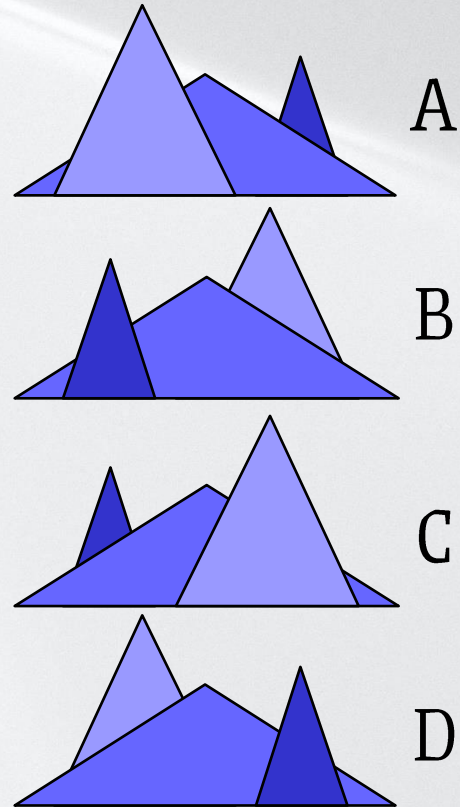
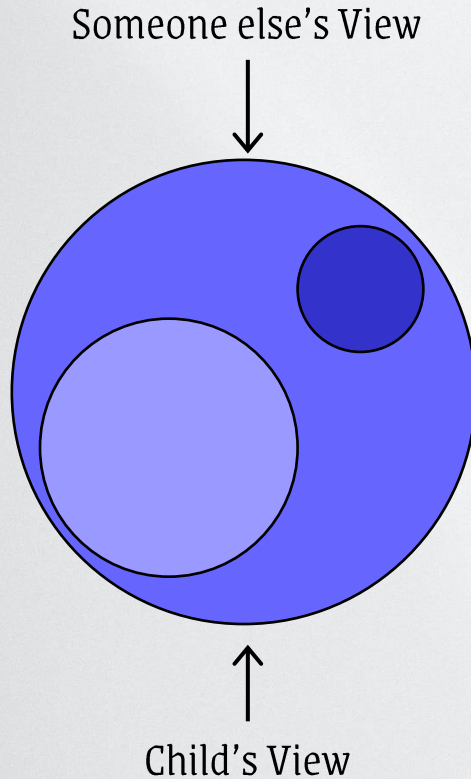
## 3 Mountain Study







# 3 Mountain Study







## 3 Mountain Study

Younger preoperational stage child can describe their own view of the mountains, but have trouble imagining what the view of the child opposite them

However, it has been shown that the task becomes easier if the role of the other child is replaced by a toy that the child is familiar with



# Egocentrism

“Ego” means oneself, and egocentrism means that a person can only think of themselves, and fails to understand other people’s viewpoint

Assume others perceive, think and feel the same way they do

This is a “problem” for young children in the pre-operational stage (see lecture on Cognitive Development)



# Adolescent Egocentrism (David Elkind)

Adolescents don't have the same problem, but they also show some very specific kind of ego-centrism – more about interpersonal relationship than physical characteristics

Unable to differentiate between “how they imagine other people think of them” and “how other people actually think of them”





# Personal Fable & Imaginary Audience

Mentally construct an autobiography for themselves

Complex of belief in the uniqueness of their feelings and their  
immortality

Belief that they are the focus of everyone else's attention and  
concern and anticipate the reactions of other people to  
themselves



## Tool 73: Adolescent Egocentrism

A person's behaviour might be explained by their belief that other people are as obsessed with their behaviour & appearance as they are themselves, & over-concerned of what others think of them

A person's behaviour might also be explained by the fact that they consider themselves unique (and maybe immortal) & therefore do not consider the risk associated with their own behaviour



## Part 5

### Sally—Anne Task

(Developed by Baron-Cohen, Leslie & Frith,  
1985)





This is Sally.



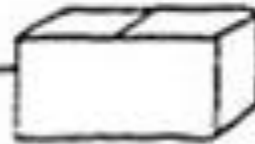
Sally has a basket.

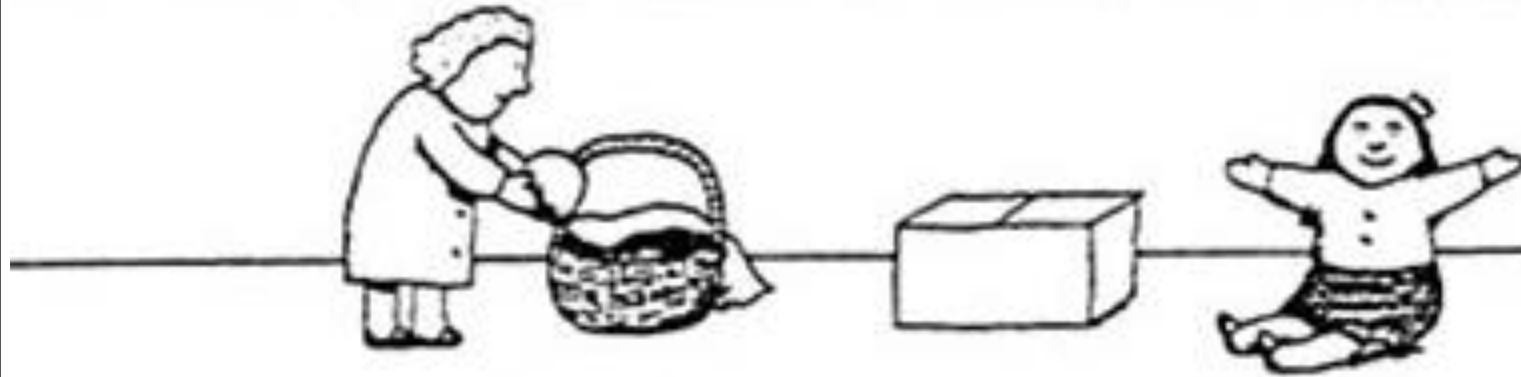


This is Anne.

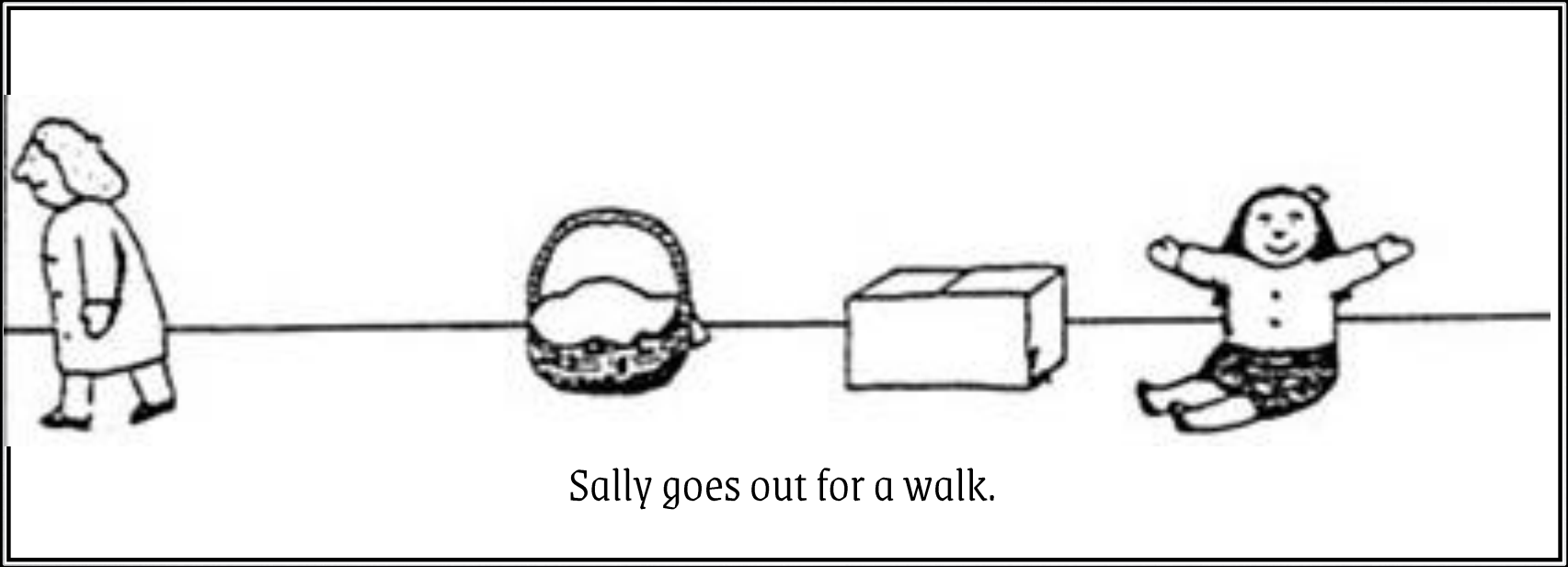


Anne has a box.





Sally has a marble. She puts the marble into her basket.







Anne takes the marble out of the basket and puts it into the box.

Now Sally comes back.

She wants to play with her marble.



Where will Sally look for the marble?



# Part 6

## Theory of Mind





## Solving the Sally—Anne Task

In order to answer the question (i.e., interpret the situation) correctly, one needs to try to understand other people's mental state

Quintessentially, we need to understand that other people's mental state is not always the same as (i) the truth, and (ii) our own mental state



# Theory of Mind & False-Belief

Theory of mind refers to one's capacity for empathy and understanding of others (i.e., one's ability to form theories of other people's mental state)

False-belief is the understanding that other people can believe things which are not true – most 4yo should be able to do this



# Different Levels of Theory of Mind

Freya likes ice-cream, and she cannot imagine there are people who do not like it

Sally thinks the marble is in the basket – the truth is that the marble is in the box, but Sally would not know that

I think you noticed that I played rock the previous 3 times, and therefore would play paper this time – so I'll play scissors





# Theory of Mind as a Social Tool

Theory of Mind is very important for: lying, instructing, cooperating, communicating, etc.;

But also for interacting with other people appropriately

There are people who are particularly weak at theory of mind (e.g., some people on the Autistic Spectrum), and might need some help to understand others' mental state



# Learning Theory of Mind ... and Empathy

Some people are naturally empathic; other people learned to read other people's feelings & thoughts instinctively

Some people learned to understand others through intellectual processes, using logic and reasoning

Some people might just need to be told about others' mental states



## Tool 74: Theory of Mind

A person's behaviour might be explained by their understanding (or lack thereof) of what other people are thinking

Young children assume others perceive, think and feel the same way they do

Most adults understand that other people can have different viewpoints and beliefs, but some people are much better at this





# Part 7

## Explaining & Suggesting Behaviours



## Scenario 1

Freida, 2, was brought to an MCHC clinic by her mother. During weighing, the mother walked out of the room to take an emergency phone call.

How would you expect Freida to behave when (i) the mother stepped out, and (ii) the mother returned?

What if Freida (a) was securely attached to the mother, (b) had avoidant attachment with mother, or (c) had resistant attachment with mother?



## Scenario 2

Patrick, 5, was brought to your clinic by his mother, Mrs. Pang. He had a fight with his sister (Patricia) because his sister ate the last piece of chocolate biscuit at home.

“Chocolate biscuits are my favourite!” Patrick says. “Everybody knows it, so Patricia should leave those to me. I hate her. Piggy (his toy) also hates her.”

Patrick’s mother tried to explain to him that Patricia was hungry and also did not know that chocolate biscuits are his favourites, but he would not listen.





# Part 8

## Behavioural Change



## Case 15

Following your success with last week's health talk (about healthy lifestyle, aimed at primary school children), your boss asks you to hold a similar talk with secondary school students.

Knowing that most of them having already reached formal operational stage, might be focusing on academic achievement, and definitely have adolescent egocentrism... you plan accordingly.







# Part 8

## Conclusion



# Conclusion

Attachment is the strong affectional tie we feel towards the significant people in our lives; there are different attachment styles between child & mother

When we grow older, we develop relationship with friends and peers through play and other social interactions; but these are also affected by our ability to understand others



## Reading / References

- Boyd, DR & Bee, H (2019). Lifespan development (8th ed.). Chapter 6.2 Attach; chapter 6.3 Factors influencing attachment; chapter 10.4 Family and Peer Relationships in Middle Childhood. Boston, MA: Pearson.





~ End of lecture ~