

Attachment Theory

What is it and how it shapes children's development

Every baby is born ready to connect — and those early relationships shape how they see the world and themselves. Attachment theory is simply about that bond between you and your child, and how feeling safe, loved, and understood helps them grow into confident, resilient people.

It's also worth remembering that no two babies are the same. Some cry more, some are easier to soothe, and some sleep better than others (as I am sure you know!).

These differences are down to temperament — your baby's natural personality — and they're there from the very beginning.



By Dr Marilena Hadjittofi
Clinical Psychologist
The Chester Psychology
Clinic

Understanding attachment helps you make sense of your child's behaviour, and respond in ways that feel right for them. There's no such thing as a "perfect" parent — just a growing relationship that builds over time.

So, let's dive straight in.
In this short guide, we'll cover:

- Key principles of attachment theory
- Why this matters in early childhood
- How to encourage a secure bond
- The good-enough parent and managing emotions in the moment
- Some final thoughts and questions

This is a short, introductory guide, so it only touches on some of the key ideas. If you have questions, would like more support, or are interested in learning more, please feel free to get in touch:

drhadjittofi@thechesterpsychologyclinic.com

www.thechesterpsychologyclinic.com



THE CHESTER
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Key principles of attachment theory...

And why it matters

Attachment is the emotional bond your child builds with you over time. It grows through everyday moments — feeding, comforting, playing, and being together. Your child learns whether the world feels safe based on how their needs are responded to.

When you consistently respond to your child, they learn that they can rely on you. This helps them feel secure, which supports confidence, learning, and relationships later on.

All parents get it right sometimes and get it wrong sometimes — that's completely normal. You will have days when you are tired, stressed and overstimulated and might not respond how you would like to. That's okay! In those moments what is important is to return to them when you are feeling calm, apologise and connect with them (cuddles, humour, play time). Talking it through helps model to them that we all sometimes have bad days and get it wrong, and that's okay. Children will often look to adults to see how they should manage their feelings and rely on us in that moment to model a helpful way of responding to a feeling.

What matters most is the overall pattern of care, not being perfect in every moment. **Attachment is something that develops over time, and it can always be strengthened.**

How to encourage a secure bond

1

The cornerstone of a secure bond is being in tune with your child's needs. What is it they need? Is it a physical need (hunger, tired, nappy change) or an emotional need (something has triggered a big emotion in them).

2

Notice how you are feeling. Before responding it's important to make sure you are also feeling grounded. **Your calm presence is one of the greatest strengths you bring to your child.**



3

The three R's make a handy guide:

- Regulate
- Relate/Re-connect
- Reflect



Children cannot talk or reflect about an emotion when they are distressed. You first start by helping them regulate (your calm becomes their anchor). You then connect with them with what they might need (hug, humour, cuddles).

Remember, you can never 'spoil' a child by providing too much warmth and affection- there is no such thing as too much love! And finally, when they are calm and relaxed you can then talk about what happened and the consequences of their actions.

The good-enough parent and managing emotions

- There's no such thing as a perfect parent — and there doesn't need to be
- Children don't need perfection, they need care that is "good enough" most of the time
- It's completely normal to misread cues, feel overwhelmed, or get things wrong
- What matters most is repairing and reconnecting after those moments
- These small repairs actually help your child learn that relationships can be mended
- Over time, this builds trust, resilience, and a sense of security

Being a 'good enough' parent means showing up, trying again, and building connection over time — not getting it right every time.



Imagine your child's emotions like the weather, and you as the tree.

Your child's feelings can change quickly — sunny one moment, stormy the next. Big feelings (like anger, fear, or sadness) can feel like strong wind or heavy rain.

As the tree, your role is to stay as steady and grounded as you can through all kinds of weather. You don't need to stop the storm — just be there, holding firm so your child feels safe.

When your child sees that you can stay calm even in “stormy” moments, it helps them feel less overwhelmed.

Over time, they begin to grow their own “roots” and learn how to manage their feelings too.



Some final thoughts and questions for you

Taking a moment to reflect can sometimes help you notice what's already working, as well as small things you might want to do differently. There's no pressure to have all the answers — just curiosity and kindness towards yourself.

- When my child is upset, how do I usually respond?
- What helps me stay calm, and what makes it harder?
- When I was a child, what helped me feel safe or comforted?
- Were there times I felt misunderstood, and how did that feel?
- What parts of my own upbringing might be influencing how I respond to my child?

