

Influences on Attachment Strategies

There are a number of influences on children's attachment behavior. I list some of these below, along with their relevance to children in care:

Caregiver information processing, strategy, and history: Caregivers' behavior is the product of what they have learned in their past as applied to current circumstances. To assess this, information about important past experience with safety/threat and comfort/distress, how meaning is derived from this experience, and how that meaning is translated into behavior, is sought (Busch, 2008; Steele & Steele, 2008).

The effect of changes in caregiver on children: Changes in caregiver after about 6 months of age are always disruptive. Older children understand and remember well who their real parents are; they do not readily accept substitutes. Younger children can become confused and unable to attach fully to anyone, especially if they have multiple moves. Sexualized behavior is more common among children who have had a series of caregivers, especially when attachments were not formed.

The effect of changes in caregiver on caregivers: The effects of change of caregiver on adults are very great.

Adults who lose access to a child to whom they have become attached experience distress and grief. Moreover, even if the children are returned to their care, they will always know that they could be taken away; this creates an insecurity not experienced by parents who have never lost access to their child.

Adults who are given a child to care for almost always form an attachment to the child. This usually takes a few weeks, but it forms quite quickly, especially to infants and young children. Regardless of their legal status, attached adults will seek to protect, comfort, and maintain access to a child to whom they have become attached. They suffer distress if the child is moved to the care of other adults.

References

Steele, H. & Steele, M. (eds) (2008) *Clinical Applications of the Adult Attachment Interview*, New York: Guilford Press.