

Attachment-Focused Parenting

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John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth showed the importance of attachment style for a child's development. Their attachment study showed that a parent's response to their child's needs has a direct effect on whether the child would be securely or insecurely attached. Daniel Hughs delves into how specific details of parenting and communication patterns affect attachment. Hugh's (2009) states "the essence of a secure attachment is the parent's ability to respond sensitively to the infant's signals and to communicate nonverbally." He explains that the intuitive behaviors of infants and their parents facilitate an expressive-receptive channel of communication. Verbal and nonverbal communication from a parent tells the child whether he exists in their inner world and if he can feel safe in times of danger. A child's sense of safety plays a crucial role in their development and formation of internal resources. Children with parents who have achieved and value skill development are more likely to develop the skills needed for identifying, regulating and expressing emotions. This relates to the fact that a parent's experience of their child largely influences his developing experience of himself. The most influential predictor of a child's attachment patterns is the attachment patterns of his parents.

When aiming to reduce attachment resistance in children, parents must first resolve their own attachment issues. Children who are demonstrating resistance to attachment behaviors typically do not have a history of feeling safe. The parent (or caregiver) can facilitate safety for the child in a few ways. First, the focus should be making his environment feel safe by controlling what the child is exposed to in his external world. A child who feels unsafe has developed self-reliance and coping skills to ensure his own safety. By creating a safe

environment for a child, he will learn he does not have to stay hyper-vigilant and will shift from relying on himself to relying on his parents. Secondly, environmental safety can also be accomplished through providing the child with structure in their day and limiting his choices in order to reduce anxiety over which decision is correct. During times of misbehavior, parents should initiate a time-in rather than a time-out to increase physical proximity and promote safety through their calm presence. If they wish, children should be allowed to calm down in a separate room but it should not be forced on them through a time-out. Children who resist attachment shy away or reject partaking in intersubjective relationships. The child needs an active presence of the caregiver and gentle persistent invitations to engage so he can develop an interest in this new way of interacting. The parent, however, should accept the child's initial response of resistance and respond with curiosity to invite the behavior into their intersubjective context. This will show the child that the parent is interested in sharing positive, as well as, difficult experiences. The nearby presence of the parent is also important in reducing the child's unidentified anxiety surrounding an absent parent. The parent should remember as well to not take on the child's emotions of anger, fear and shame but to respond to the underlying vulnerabilities of the child rather than to the behaviors.

Hughes, D. (2009). *Attachment-Focused Parenting: Effective strategies to care for children*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co.