

# Attachment Theory in Practice at Linden Lodge

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# Attachment Theory

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John Bowlby developed Attachment Theory. The theory states that babies are born programmed to form attachments in order to give them the best chance of survival.

The baby requires safety and elicits care-giving behaviour from adults by engaging in attachment-seeking behaviours (crying, cooing, smiling, reaching, moving towards). The baby repeats the behaviours which most effectively get their needs met, developing default behaviours. The need can be any kind, including physiological, social, psychological, emotional, physical, intellectual.

The primary attachment relationship (i.e. with first main parent or caregiver) creates a blueprint for future relationships. We all develop a default attachment style based on early relationships which in moments of stress can be our fall-back position.



# Attachment Styles

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## Secure Attachment

- Children develop a *secure attachment style* when their needs are appropriately responded to
- Confident and resilient

## Insecure Attachment

- Children develop one of three insecure attachment styles when their needs are not consistently and appropriately responded to, or are not responded to at all.

**Insecure ambivalent:** They never quite know if their needs will be met, and have to develop strategies that make sure the parent stays focused on them to maximise their chances of physical and psychological survival.

**Insecure avoidant:** They learn that many of their needs will not be met and become outwardly self-sufficient children, who rely as little as possible on outside support.

**Insecure disorganised:** They have often suffered, or may still be experiencing trauma through neglect or abuse. These will be the most vulnerable children you work with; they don't have any reliable strategies for ensuring their physical and psychological survival and you may see this in their frightening or unpredictable behaviour.

*You may recognise yourself in one of these – and that's important.*

# Your role as a secondary attachment figure:


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Working with CYP, you will be an attachment figure for many of the children and young people you work with. You can help insecure children learn what it feels like to be able to trust the world to support their survival.

- Secure attachment lays the foundation for wellbeing and the capacity to learn.
- Children need an attachment figure to be proximate, emotionally available and responsive to their needs.

## **Secure attachments enable a child to:**

- Regulate emotions
- Reduce fear
- Attune to others
- Develop self understanding and insight
- Develop moral reasoning
- Empathy for others



For our students, they have many people in and out of their lives. Building up trusting relationships is paramount.

- Sandra Cox, Linden Lodge  
Teacher and Transitions  
Coordinator

# Attunement

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Attunement is the ability to recognise, understand and engage with another's emotional state.

This *should* begin in infancy when the caregiver communicates to baby that they are in sync and that they understand what the baby is doing, feeling and thinking. This assists brain development and over time teaches the baby how to self-regulate, make sense of their emotions and communicate their needs. If a child's feelings are continually discounted, ignored or reprimanded, they will not know how to soothe, respond, or express those emotions in adulthood.



*We can't attune with others unless we first learn to attune with ourselves.*

# Attunement in our unique context

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*“Pupil Voice is at the heart of everything we do and the key to realising our school motto: enabling, nurturing, succeeding. Linden Lodge caters to the needs of such a diverse range of individuals and, as such, Pupil Voice can be different from person to person. It is our job to seek, listen to, and act upon each pupil’s voice as it is.”*

When we are attuned, really attuned, interacting with a CYP without presumption, we enable them to express themselves.

Our childhood experiences set the scene for our adult life; many of our student group don’t have the skills and the voice to express their emotions. For us as practitioners, it’s all about how we interpret communications/behaviours and ask ‘is there something underlying here?’ rather than dismiss it.  
– Sandra Cox,  
*Linden Lodge Teacher and Transitions Coordinator*

Young people in our setting are very different in terms of how they express mental health issues. Behaviours can easily be written off when they too are a unique communication.  
– Agata Plasa, *Linden Lodge TA*

Our children can’t always express themselves. We have to understand their way of expressing themselves – their facial features, their body movements, their needs. It is so essential in our school. We have to know these children better in order to help and be the best we can.  
– Rudina Zerka, *Linden Lodge TA*

# Learning attunement

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If we haven't experienced enough attunement in childhood, how can we learn and practice as adults?

- **Start recognising, labelling and accepting your own emotions** – When you feel an emotional reaction to something, stop and identify the emotion. Is it happiness, sadness, anger, disappointment or guilt, for example. Now give yourself permission to feel the emotion. Every emotion you feel is valid, acceptable and real.
- **Shift your focus to understanding what the other person feels** – A useful quote to remember is; seek to understand before seeking to be understood.
- **In interactions with another, try to identify the emotions they are feeling** – If appropriate, ask them clarifying questions to identify the trigger of their emotions and focus on empathising with their feelings. You may say things like 'I can understand why that would make you feel sad', 'I'm sorry that you had to experience that', etc. Try not to invalidate their feelings, even if it makes you feel defensive as it relates to your behaviour.