2.1.1 Attachment

Attachment is the term used to describe the relationship an infant develops with their primary care giver(s). The attachment relationship is an affectionate bond that endures through time and it connects the infant with their care giver(s) physically and emotionally (Bowlby 1969).   The attachment relationship develops by care givers responding appropriately to a baby or child's needs. For example, when a baby cries, care givers comfort the baby, feed them or change their nappy, and hold them. The care giver is fulfilling the baby's physical and emotional needs. As the baby gets older and is crawling or walking, they need to see their care giver as a 'secure base' from which they can explore their environment. If the baby gets distressed, they return to their care giver to have their emotional needs met. They are then able to leave their secure base again and learn more about their environment.

Bowlby suggested that these early experiences between an infant and a care giver created the child's 'internal working models'. These models influence what the child thinks about themselves ("Am I loveable?"); what they feel about others ("Are other people reliable and do they meet my needs?"); and how they experience the world ("Is the world out there a safe place to be explored and learn from?").

Ainsworth and others have identified 4 main attachment styles with characteristic behaviours of both the infant and the care giver. It is important to note that insecure ambivalent and insecure avoidant infants do have an attachment to their care giver: as many as 40% of young people in school may have these types of insecure attachments.

Attachment style	Infant behaviour	Caregiver behaviour
Secure	Confidently explores their environment Can concentrate on play activities for extended periods Seeks help from the care giver when needed	Responds to the infant's need appropriately, warmly and consistently Provides comfort and enjoyment
Insecure ambivalent	Tentative exploration of the environment Seeks lots of support from the care giver as they are uncertain about what response will be given	Varies between being sensitive and insensitive to the infant's needs
Insecure avoidant	Very vigilant when exploring the environment Appear to be self-sufficient, but actually self-regulation is poor	Dismissive and consistently insensitive to the emotional needs of the infant Usually responds appropriately to physical needs
Disorganised	Does not explore the environment. Infant feels that their distress increases when they appeal to the care giver Erratic behaviour: self-comfort, detachment, anger	Responds to infant needs by being frightening or frightened Frequently neglectful and/or abusive Abandons the infant and may leave them with unfamiliar carers

Section 2.2.1 explains how schools can help with varying attachment types.

2.2.1 Promoting positive behaviour according to attachment type

2.2.1.1 Attachment type: Insecure ambivalent

Internal Working Model[1]
- Some ability to trust, relate to others and self-regulate, but also
- Clingy, rejecting, irritable moods and episodes of poor self-regulation

Typical behaviours
- Talks all the time
- Constantly asks seemingly irrelevant questions
- Demands constant attention from the teacher
- Hostile when frustrated
- Poor concentration
- Fidgeting, turning round all the time

What the child thinks or feels
- I feel safer if I do all the talking
- I want to communicate but I am not sure how to do so appropriately
- If I don't keep reminding you I am here you might forget about me and abandon me
- I am afraid of getting things wrong
- Negative attention is better than no attention
- I cannot relax. I must check the room all the time for danger

What the school can do
- Have a set routine
- All first tasks should be achievable
- Sit the child close to you
- Allow the child to wait quietly
- Acknowledge the child through both verbal and non- verbal gestures
- Give the child something to look after
- Give the child responsibility for things (not people)
- Give the child something tactile to fiddle with
- Use a timer for tasks
- Break tasks down into small steps
- Arrange seating so there is no one behind the child, but you are still close
- Laugh with the child, even at silly things

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[1] See Section 2.1.1

2.2.1.2 Attachment type: Insecure avoidant

Internal Working Model
- Some trust in relation to physical needs being met
- Guarded and self-sufficient.

Typical behaviours
- Withdrawn
- Unable to make or keep friends
- Bullies other vulnerable children
- Refuses help with work
- Destroys property

What the child thinks or feels
- I have to rely on myself and no one else
- I run away from frightening situations
- I need to make other children do what I want
- I don't value anything
- I am not interested in anything that isn't mine
- I am angry and take it out on things

What the school can do
- Use a buddy system or 'Circle of Friends'
- Encourage the child to help around school
- Offer paired or small group work
- Ask the child to help another who is less able
- Acknowledge the child's feelings "I can see you are angry….."
- Help the child repair or restore where possible
- Consider restorative approaches

2.2.1.3 Attachment type: Disorganised

Internal Working Model
- Distrustful, fearful,
- Confused,
- Angry and despairing.

Typical behaviours
- Refuses to engage with work
- Tries to create chaos
- Oppositional and defiant
- Sexually aggressive

What the child thinks or feels
- Making mistakes is very frightening
- Being wrong will lead to terrible rejection
- I am chaotic inside and I feel safer if it is chaotic outside too
- I must be in control so that I will not get hurt
- I must not be exposed as stupid
- You are horrible like all adults
- I know from experience that sex=power and I must be in control

What the school can do
- Offer choices, making sure all the choices are appealing
- Make tasks very structured: multiple choice/ cloze/ sentence completion
- Make sure all the materials that the child will need are readily accessible to them
- Aim to modify the most serious behaviour only
- Acknowledge and recognise the child's feelings "I can see you are upset…….."
- Be assertive
- Avoid showing anger, irritation or fear
- Start each day with a clean slate
- Record all incidents very clearly and seek help from other agencies where necessary

2.2.1.4 Other indicators of attachment difficulties

Typical behaviours
- Unable to accept praise
- Cannot have fun
- Physically or verbally abusive
- Ignores instructions
- Sulks
- Avoids eye contact
- In trouble at break and lunchtimes
- Lying
- Stealing

What the child thinks or feels
- I don't deserve praise
- You must be stupid if you can't see how bad I am
- When I am frightened I run away, fight or freeze
- I have too much anxiety to listen or concentrate
- I have no words to describe my feelings
- I am afraid of being rejected by my peers
- I panic in crowds
- I am not sure who I am or what the truth is
- I prefer to make things up how I wish that they could be
- I don't expect to get what I want or need
- I don't know that you can feel hurt or angry
- I feel powerful when you are upset

What the school can do
- Be very specific when giving praise
- Consider giving praise in private
- Do not threaten removal or rejection: be inclusive "come and sit next to me while I help the rest of the class"
- 'Think out loud' about why the behaviour may have happened, but don't ask the child to explain "I wonder if you felt hurt when JJ didn't choose you to be their partner'
- Keep a set routine
- Explicitly say the plan of activities for the session at the beginning
- Let the child make lists
- Reassure verbally and non-verbally: smiling, thumbs up
- Sit with the child side by side
- Increase structure and supervision at break and lunchtime
- Have an inside retreat for break and lunchtimes

- Don't accuse a child of lying: just state the truth or reality simply and briefly
- Do not insist that a child says sorry: use restorative approaches and allow the child to repair the situation where possible

When behaviour suddenly deteriorates

This can happen around special occasions like Mother's Day, birthdays, religious celebrations and weekends or at other times

What the child is thinking or feeling
- There is a painful anniversary coming up
- A new sibling has been born
- I have contact with my birth family coming up
- I have just had contact with my birth family (expected or unexpected)
- Before or after weekends

What the school can do
- Be sensitive in the delivery of the curriculum
- Allow the child the time and space to deal with feelings away from the classroom