

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

# Attachment Theory: Understanding the Essential Bond

In 1958, psychologist John Bowlby pioneered “attachment theory,” the idea that the early bond between parent and child is critical to a child’s emotional development. Since then, scientists have discovered that insecure attachment during formative years can significantly stress both the developing brain and body, resulting in long-term psychological and physical ailments. For instance, low levels of attachment security have been linked to diminished levels of cortisol, a steroidal hormone released in response to stress that is critical in reducing inflammation in the body. Recent studies are using cortisol levels as a marker to determine the success of early intervention in building stronger attachments between struggling parents and children.

## CLASS DISCUSSION

### Establish Prior Knowledge

Remind students that when a baby is born it has certain needs. Write the following needs on the board and discuss the importance of each one with students:

- Clothing
- Food
- Security blanket or stuffed animal
- Being held by a parent or caregiver
- Stimulation from toys or television
- Sleep

After the discussion call on students to rank each item according to its importance to a baby’s health and well being. Explain that in the video they are about to see, scientists look at the attachment between a child and parent or caregiver and test how that relationship may affect a child’s mental and physical health.

### Exploration

Have students read the synopsis and watch the video. Use the following questions to guide a class discussion.

- What was the theory proposed by John Bowlby in regards to a child’s development?  
*(Answer: Bowlby proposed that, besides food, a child needed to be held in order to forge a bond with an understanding, sensitive, and responsive adult and that this bond was critical to the child’s emotional development.)*
- In tests scientists observed a child’s response to a parent leaving the room. How did an insecurely attached child react when the parent left the room?  
*(Answer: The insecurely attached child acted independently and seemed not to notice when the parent left the room. Physiologically the child was agitated and remained agitated even when the parent or caregiver returned.) How did a securely attached child react when the parent or caregiver left the room? (Answer: The child would be upset or would cry. The child would look to the parent or caregiver for comfort when he or she returned. The child cease being agitated would return easily to the previous task.)*
- In terms of health, what psychological and biological ailments might people with adverse childhood experiences be susceptible to?  
*(Answer: Substance abuse, depression, suicide, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, stroke, bronchitis/ Emphysema.)*

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# Attachment Theory (cont'd)

- What is cortisol and what does it do?  
*(Answer: cortisol is a steroidal hormone that is released in response to stress. It is critical in reducing inflammation in the body that can lead to cardiovascular disease.)*
- How are low levels of security attachment and cortisol linked?  
*(Answer: People with low levels of security attachment also have diminished levels of cortisol and so are more susceptible to ailments such as cardiovascular disease.)*
- An early intervention program at the Center for Babies, Toddlers and Families is building stronger attachments between struggling parents and children. How does the program whether their intervention is successful?  
*(Answer: The program measures the attachment between child and parent. After six months of therapy 70 percent of participants demonstrated a secure attachment as compared to just 15 per cent at the beginning of the intervention. Cortisol levels will also be used to determine the success of the program. Cortisol levels were measured at the beginning of the program and will be measured at intervals to determine whether a more secure attachment has an affect on cortisol levels.)*

### Wrap-Up

Refer to the list of needs on the board. Ask students:

- After watching the video, would you change your ranking of the importance of an infant's needs? Why or why not?