

# Understanding attachment and classroom function

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# Early brain development

- The early years is a period of rapid brain growth where over 2 billion synaptic connections take place every second.
- Our experiences help to prune the synaptic connection during this time of overproduction.
- Connections that are used regularly become stronger and more complex.
- Connections that are not used are discarded (pruned away).

# Early brain development



REPTILIAN BRAIN

Sensory/  
motor and  
survival



LIMBIC BRAIN

Attachment  
and emotional  
development



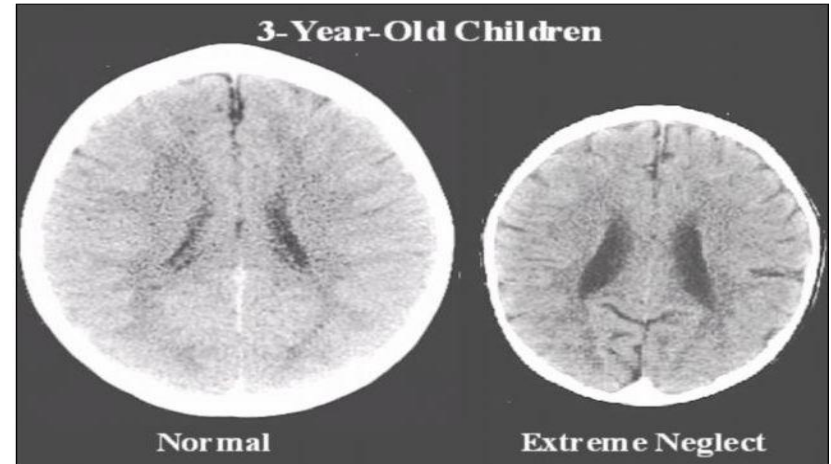
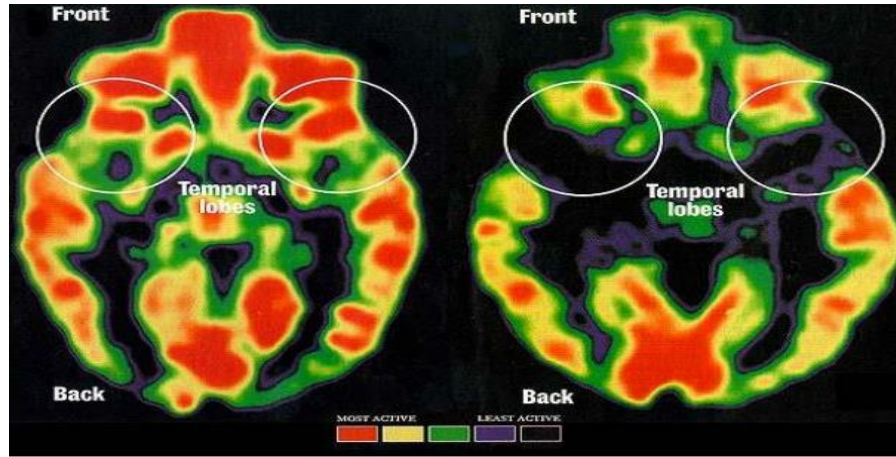
NEOCORTEX

Thinking,  
learning and  
inhibiting

# Relationships are at the heart of early brain development

- Recent research has found that children who experience **nurturing environments with regular sensory input** (physical touch) experience typical brain development in the **hippocampus** (stress reactivity/processing emotions).
- Children experiencing **environments that lack nurture and sensory input** (physical touch) tend to have a **smaller cortex** which is the area of the brain that supports social ability and emotional intelligence.

# Effects on the brain – poor attachment



# Attachment is key to neurological development

- When an infant cries, gurgles, tracks with their eyes, they are putting out a signal to ensure that their carers respond to them. In turn leading to their needs being met.
- If the response is consistent the infant learns to anticipate similar responses in the future. Over time infants develop perceptions that influence how a baby understands the environment, relates to others and engages in learning.
- If the response is inconsistent or the infant receives no response, they come to expect the behaviours of others to be negative.
- This leads to the child perceiving new experiences in a negative way.



# Still face experiment



# Internal working model

- From birth to 3 years a child forms an opinion about themselves and the world around them based on their interactions with their primary care givers.
- Three main features:
  1. Understanding that people are trustworthy
  2. Value of self
  3. Value of self when interacting with others.
- If a child experiences a disrupted attachment with the primary caregiver they may view the world as a hostile environment.

(Bowlby, 1990)



# Attachment theory

“The propensity to make strong emotional bonds to particular individuals is a basic component of human nature.”

“A secure attachment enables a child to explore the world around them, from a safe base, and return to it when in need of comfort and safety.”

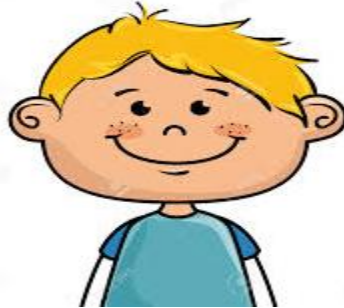
(J.Bowlby, 1988)



# Classroom presentation – Secure Attachment

Curiosity necessary to make the most of the learning opportunities at school.

Socially competent with high levels of self esteem



Able to take the risks required by the learning process.

Able to problem solve and manage conflict.

Confident to try new things.

Able to sustain focus

“I am safe and the world is safe”

# Classroom presentation – Insecure Avoidant Attachment

Become self sufficient

Avoid seeking attachments.

Reluctant to engage or manage a problem.

Unable to accept praise.

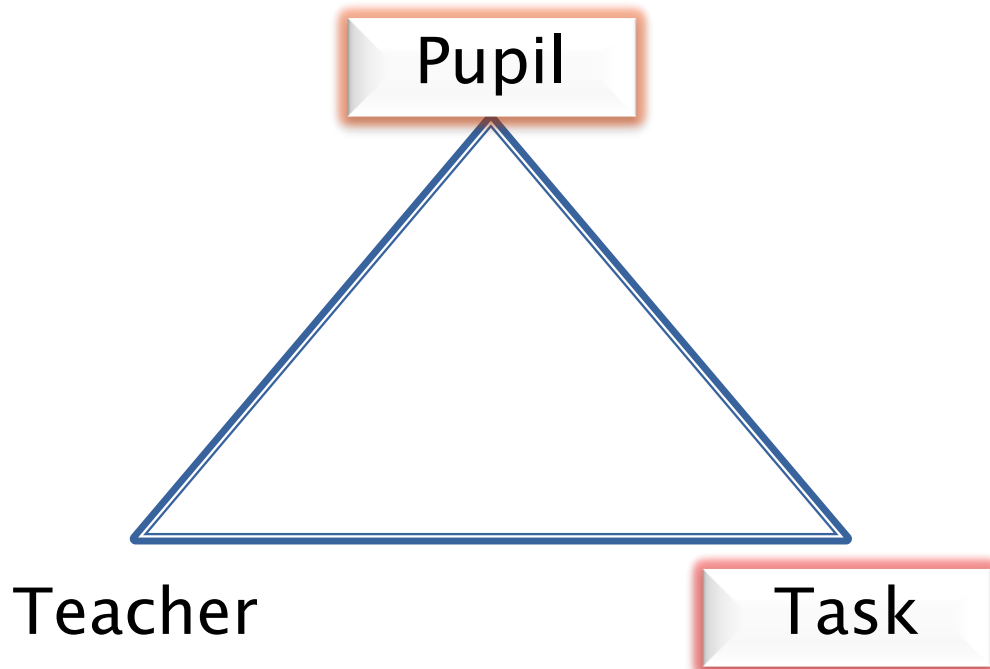


Want tasks to be independent, even when they aren't sure what to do.

May be the child that destroys their work.

“If you seek attachments,  
likely to be rejected”

# Classroom presentation – Insecure Avoidant Attachment



- Often children that need help won't seek it.
- They are often hiding an anxiety.
- In order to deal with this they may become controlling of their environment.
- Perfectionism/obsessive behaviours.

# Classroom presentation – Insecure Ambivalent Attachment

Relentless communication.

Regular monitoring of relationships/reassurance seeking

Quick to blame others if they are upset.

Overly dependent on adults

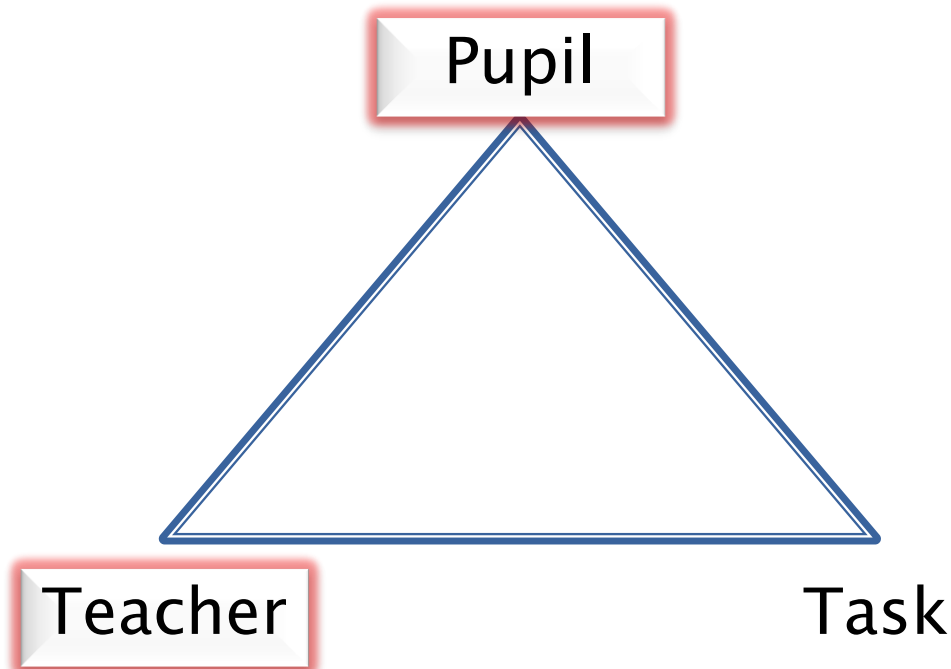


Unable to focus on a task in case they lose the attention of the adult.

Struggles to regulate emotions

“When you need something you cannot trust that an adult will help.”

# Classroom presentation – Insecure Ambivalent Attachment



- Children often become so preoccupied with the teacher pupil relationship that they are unable to focus on the task.
- For these children, losing the relationship feels dangerous as it involves separation.



# How can we help? – Reptilian brain

- Teach self regulation.
- Co-regulating adults that support managing the fight/flight/freeze response.

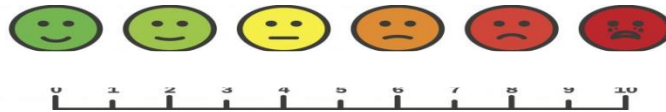


CALM DOWN WITH TAKE 5 BREATHING



# How can we help? – Limbic brain

- Support the development of positive relationships.
- Implement emotional literacy strategies including;
  - Emotion coaching,
  - Small group work to discuss each others reactions and possible feelings to situations – Youtube clips.
  - Use books/puppets/role play to explore feelings of characters.



Name: \_\_\_\_\_ My \_\_\_\_\_ Scale

Rating	Looks Like	Feels Like	I can try to
5			
4			
3			
2			
1			

# Supporting attachments



# How can we help? – Neocortex

“Externalise what is not happening internally”

- Visual timetables – to support planning and organisation.
- Timers – to support concept of time
- CBT based approaches to challenge thinking.
- Structured consistent environments promote safety and security.
- Language of choice to support problem solving

# Thank you!

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