WHY ATTACHMENT MATTERS
Supporting resilience through attachment

EARLY EDUCATION EYPP NEWCASTLE
ANNE O’CONNOR
TIMES ARE HARD…

Building resilience is important

We learn resilience through hard knocks… right?
Resilience comes from…

- Having enough positive experiences to create a sense of security and trust in others as well as yourself.

- Feelings of self worth and knowing that others believe in you ... that helps you know you can get through the hard times.

- Having a safe place to build your resilience gradually ... to take risks and make mistakes.

- Being well-supported through difficulty and challenge.
Resilience expert?

Early trauma and lack of secure attachments can lead to unhealthy forms of resilience.

This is one of the most important reasons why ATTACHMENT REALLY MATTERS
Infant attachment cycle

1. Baby has a need
2. Baby cries
3. Need met by caregiver
4. Trust develops

www.attachmenttraumanetwork.org
What can get in the way of attachment?

- Not about blame
- Generational cycles of insecure attachments
- Post-natal depression
- Lack of support
- Separation
- Illness
- Substance abuse
- Poverty?
Trauma?

- Not always headline news
- Impact of not meeting a baby’s needs
- Emotional neglect and abuse
- Lack of unconditional regard
- Impact on brain development
What does insecure attachment feel like?

Like an astronaut floating in space cut off from any lifeline?
Avoidant
Self soothing
Self reliant
Won’t be taught

Ambivalent
Suspicious/distrustful
Clingy
Needs reassurance

What does insecure attachment look like?

Disorganised ... all kinds of everything
Extreme
Frightened

Erratic
Frightening

Secure enough
OH - THEY ALL DO THAT...

But children with attachment issues might do it …

➢ more often
➢ more intensely
➢ and for a lot longer!
Early trauma and insecure attachments can be linked with:

- Poor self regulation
- Lack of executive functioning skills
- Poor physical development
- Developmental delay and learning difficulties

Symptoms can be confused with ADHD etc

http://acestoohigh.com/2014/07/07/how-childhood-trauma-could-be-mistaken-for-adhd

Remember: Think Toddler ... and CAN’T not WON’T
The impact of stress and cortisol

- Behaviour
- Learning
- Emotional wellbeing
- Physical health

Depression, anxiety disorders, alcohol and substance abuse, and eating and digestive disorders have all been linked with unrelieved stress in early life.

Transitions expert?

Experiencing lots of trauma and/or unsupported change doesn’t make a child good at handling transitions.
Transitions and new people in our lives are not a bad thing in themselves – there are times we can all benefit from fresh relationships and new challenges, but for babies and young children this is not desirable.

If broken attachments and serial carers are to be the norm then we are disregarding all we know about the importance of stable, healthy, secure relationships with just a few special people to nurture children’s wellbeing, health and dispositions for learning.

Dorothy Y. Selleck

PRIMED FOR LIFE 2016
‘We can never remind ourselves too often that a child, particularly a very young and almost totally dependant one, is the only person in the nursery who cannot understand why he is there.’

‘He can only explain it as abandonment, and unless he is helped in a positive and affectionate way...

...this will mean levels of anxiety greater than he can tolerate.’

Goldschmied and Jackson 1994
‘Toddlers who are *insecurely* attached to their primary attachment figure have a risk factor.

Toddlers who are *securely* attached may have a risk factor if they are in non-parental daycare without an attachment figure.

…if toddlers are both insecurely attached and have no access to an attachment figure during daycare, they experience two risk factors…’

*R Bowlby 2007*
Patchwork childcare and education from birth to 5

- Cared for by parents
- Cared for in the family
- Nanny/au pair
- Child minder
- Toddler group
- Play group
- Day nursery
- Nursery school
- Nursery class
- Pre-school
- Emergency drop-in
- Kindergarten
- Creche
- Reception class
- Y1

PRIMED FOR LIFE 2016
Seamless transitions?

Where are the practitioners in this patchwork?

Perhaps we are the ‘thread’ that holds the whole thing together? But... this thread needs to be strongly stitched and of the highest quality if this patchwork is not to fray and come apart.

*O’Connor (2012)* Understanding Transitions in the Early Years: Supporting change through attachment and resilience
Secondary attachments

THE ‘BACK UP’ TEAM

YOU
Positive attachments help build resilience for change:

- Through intimacy and attunement – child feels ‘known’
- Through relationship – child doesn’t feel alone
- Through security – child feels safe enough to take risks and explore ... and learn
- Through unconditional regard – child feels loved no matter what

AN EFFECTIVE KEY PERSON APPROACH IS ESSENTIAL IN SUPPORTING ATTACHMENT AND HELPING TO BUILD RESILIENCE
Why attachment matters in early years settings

Effective Key People ...

✓ Support the child’s primary attachments
✓ Provide emotional containment and a secure base
✓ Discover that getting it right for children with attachment issues, helps them get it right for all children
Feeling ‘held in mind’ is fundamental to attachment, helps build resilience and supports transition.

How will you help me ‘hold my parents in mind’?
How will you reassure me they won’t forget me?
How will you show me YOU won’t forget me?

What if you forget me?
What if I forget you?
Thank you for listening

And good luck with your hard work and efforts for all of our children.