

Session 1.5

Proximity maintenance & separation distress

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This session explores two more distinguishing features of attachment behaviour, proximity maintenance and separation distress.

Practitioners will have the opportunity to observe children displaying these behaviours and the responses they receive from their carers and to reflect on what they as practitioners can do in their daily practice to support children at these times.



Video - Proximity maintenance & separation distress

John Bowlby who developed the initial theory on attachment, describes 4 distinguishing features:


- *A secure base*
- *A safe haven*
- *Proximity maintenance*
- *Separation distress*

In this session we explore the second 2 features and in the

previous session (1.4) we explored the first 2 features.

Proximity maintenance: Keeping close enough to your attachment figure so that they are available to meet your needs. If the key person moves away from the child the child moves to be nearer to the key person as if attached by an invisible piece of elastic. As child develops in confidence and independence it's as if this piece of invisible elastic stretches further and further as the child feels able to explore further away from their attachment figure.

Separation distress: A rational response of distress to being separated from attachment figure. The child needs empathy and understanding to help cope with this overwhelming emotion. Distraction can help at times but it's more important that the child's emotions are acknowledged and dealt with sensitively.



'We can never remind ourselves too often that a child, particularly a very young and almost dependent 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.'

Elinor Goldschmied et. Al

Task 1



Proximity maintenance & separation distress - video clip 1



Proximity maintenance & separation distress - video clip 2



Proximity maintenance & separation distress - video clip 3



Proximity maintenance & separation distress - video clip 4



Proximity maintenance & separation distress - video clip 5

The following clips show children exhibiting proximity maintenance and separation distress.

Practitioners are asked to bear in mind Elinor Goldschmied's quote whilst observing the clips and to:

- Look out for how children maintain their key persons' proximity
- How children show their separation distress and how this is handled by their carers



Proximity maintenance & separation distress - video clip 1

- Cries, reaches arms out, bottom shuffles very quickly across room to where mum has gone



Proximity maintenance & separation distress - video clip 2

- Cries, reaches out for dad, eyes follow dad out, not interested in toast as too upset, turns head away, Key person has tried to distract him with toast but he's not ready for this, key person talks kindly to him about feeling upset and cuddles him, this helps.



Proximity maintenance & separation distress - video clip 3

- Clings to mum doesn't want to be separated, reaches out to mum from hold of key person, cries and sobs 'I don't like it here'.
- On return Seb runs to mum, he looks overcome with emotion and upset at seeing mum through relief that she has returned. He soon cheers up once he's had his cuddle with mum and is feeling secure again back with her.



Proximity maintenance & separation distress - video clip 4

- Cries 'mummy, mummy, mummy', he seems inconsolable. His key person cuddles him and talks gently to him, after some time she tries interesting him in a book but keeps him close and cuddled up, eventually he calms.



Proximity maintenance & separation distress - video clip 5

- Sat on dad's knee, happy whilst dad is very close, as dad tries to move him to leave he tries to climb back onto dad's knee and pushes into him to try and stay attached.

Reflection

- What were your emotions when you watched these clips?

Possible thoughts: sad or upset seeing child feeling so distressed, Have had similar experiences trying to calm children, Reminds them of particular children whom need to stick close by them or who have become distressed

- **What do you think are the best ways of supporting children with their need to be close and separation distress? How can practitioners support each other to make this easier?**

Possible thoughts: To give children the closeness they need as much as possible, sometimes it's difficult to be there all the time, some children need you more than others, it can be emotionally and physically exhausting for the practitioner, Working closely as a team helps, being able to talk to each other about the children and how it makes us feel helps, having good supportive management and good supervision is a great support, talking to parents and coming up with strategies together to support the child at times of separation etc.

- **Do some of your key children need more time with you than others? Why do you think this is?**

Possible thoughts: Often some children become very attached and some may seem clingy, If a child needs to be close pushing them away or not giving them the closeness they need does not help them to become independent. A child who is allowed to be dependent and has their dependency needs met can begin to develop independence.

Reasons why some may need more time with you: need to feel secure, new to setting, changes at home, changes in the setting, new experiences, feeling unwell or tired, very young etc.

- **What are the implications for practice in managing the amount of time practitioners spend with their key children?**

Possible thoughts: Ensuring all of your key children have their needs met and that you are not just meeting the needs of one child in particular, is it actually the practitioners needs rather than the child's that are being met, working as a team to support each other but what if one practitioner spends most of the time sat cuddling a child? are supervision meetings used to discuss how practitioners are managing their time with their key children?

Action to be taken

From the discussions that you have had during this session, decide what actions you or your group need to put in place. Can you include making time to do observations in your setting?

Perhaps ask the team to discuss what they would like to change in daily practice that would support them in being more 'available'.