

ECS Para Las Familias

**The Importance of Parent/Child Attachment
in the Latino Community**

**12th Annual Early Childhood Mental
Health Conference - We Can't Wait**

HHS LIVE WELL First 5 San Diego

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What is Attachment?


Attachment is a strong affectionate tie we have with special people in our lives that lead us to experience pleasure when we interact with them and to be comforted by nearness in times of stress.
(Laura Berk, 2012)

Attachment is a deep and enduring emotional bond that connects one person to another across time and space.
(Ainsworth, 1974)

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Edward John Mostyn Bowlby (1907-1990)

- ❖ John Bowlby was a British child psychiatrist and Psychoanalyst.
- ❖ He is credited with the first theories that described attachment as a “lasting psychological connectedness between human beings.”
- ❖ Bowlby’s first formal statement of attachment theory was published in: *The Nature of Child’s Ties to His mother* (1958).
- ❖ Bowlby believed that the earliest bond formed by children with their caregivers have a tremendous impact that continues throughout life.



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Edward John Mostyn Bowlby (1907-1990)

According to Bowlby, maternal separation in kids can be seen through 3 phases:
Protest, Despair, and Detachment:

- ❖ **Protest** – Involves demonstration of distress at separation and attempts to regain her by crying loudly, throwing oneself around etc.
- ❖ **Despair** – is the “quiet” stage in which the child is in a state of mourning and is withdrawn and undermining intermittent or monotonous crying may occur.
- ❖ **Detachment** is considered a sign of recovery as the child shows more interested in the environment. When the mother visit the child shows no interest in her and may turn away.


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Why is attachment between a child and a caregiver so important?

- ❖ The child’s first relationship is a love relationship that will have profound long-lasting effect on an individual’s subsequent development.
- ❖ Caregivers who are available and responsive to their infant’s needs establish a sense of security in their children.
- ❖ When the infants know that the caregiver is dependable, it creates a secure base for the child to then explore the world.
- ❖ Attachments should lay a good foundation for being able to form other secure relationships.




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Why is attachment between a child and a caregiver so important? (Cont.)

The Central theme of attachment theory is that caregivers who are available and responsive to their infant's needs establish a sense of security in their children.

- ❖ Ethological theory of attachment recognizes infant's emotional ties to the caregivers as an evolved response that promotes survival.
- ❖ Bowlby retained the psychoanalyst idea that quality of attachment to caregiver has profound implications for a child's security and capacity to form trusting relationships. But he said, "feeding is not the basis for attachment."




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The Four Components of Attachment


- ❖ **Safe Haven** – When the child feels threatened or afraid, he or she can return to the caregiver for comfort and soothing.
- ❖ **Secure Base** – The caregiver provides a secure and dependable base for the child to explore the world.
- ❖ **Proximity Maintenance** – The child strives to stay near the caregiver, thus keeping the child safe.
- ❖ **Separation Distress** – When separated from the caregiver, the child will become upset and stressed.




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Can a Child form an Attachment Bond with his Father or Someone else Other Than his/her Biological Mother?




- ❖ A famous experiment was conducted by Harlow and Zimmerman in 1959, which showed that developing a close bond does not depend on hunger satisfaction.
- ❖ They conducted the experiment where rhesus monkey babies were separated from their natural mothers and reared by surrogate. A terry cloth "mother" covered and other was wire mesh "mother".



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Can a Child form an Attachment Bond with his Father or Someone else Other Than his/her Biological Mother?




- ❖ Babies cling to terry cloth "mothers" even though wired mesh mothers had the bottle.
- ❖ This shows "contact comfort" is more important and the need for closeness and affection is much deeper.

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Mary Ainsworth (1913-1999)



A developmental psychologist perhaps best known for her **Strange Situation experiment** and contributions to the area of attachment theory. Ainsworth elaborated on Bowlby's research on attachment and developed an approach to observing a child's attachment to a caregiver.

Based on her research, she identified three major styles of attachment that children have to their parents or caregivers.

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Ainsworth Styles of Attachment in Children

- ❖ **Secure Attachment** – Exhibit distress when separated from caregivers. Feel secure and able to depend on their adult caregivers. When frightened, secure attached children will seek comfort from caregivers.
- ❖ **Ambivalent Attachment** – Usually become very distressed when a parent leaves. Relatively uncommon style. Cannot depend on their mother (or caregiver) to be there when in need.
- ❖ **Avoidant attachment** – Tend to avoid parents or caregivers. When offered a choice, will show no preference between caregiver and a complete stranger.


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Cultural Differences when Working thought the Lens of Attachment Theory

- ❖ There is general consensus that culture largely determines the inferred basis of parenthood, so that parenting is defined according to cultural understanding and is grounded on the past experiences of the culture within its unique environment. (Baumirind, 1995)
- ❖ Van Ijendoorn, Bakermans-Kranerburg, and Sagi-Schwartz (2006) proposed that important aspects of attachment have often been misinterpreted as universal, and that many studies have neglected the account for culture-specific influences.
- ❖ Culture plays a significant role in attachment relationships, outline parental values, norms, expectations, and beliefs about attachment that consequently influences parenting behaviors related to attachment. (Thanh 20017)




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Cultural Differences when Working thought the Lens of Attachment Theory

Deborah T. Townsend (2004) found that Anglo mothers perceived the child who lacked independence as clingy and dependent. Puerto Rican mothers, on the other hand, stressed proper demeanor as the central component to appropriate relatedness. A child said to possess proper demeanor is also said to possess four qualities that increase the likelihood of esteem from the community.

- ❖ Es educado (well brought up)
 - ❖ Tranquilo (calm)
 - ❖ Obediente (obedient)
 - ❖ Respetuoso (respectful)




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Things to Consider When Working with The Latino Community

- ❖ In the Latino culture, mothers value obedience and respect more than U. S. mainstream values such as independence, autonomy, and being assertive (Arcia & Johnson, 1998)
- ❖ Arcia and Johnson found that for Mexican immigrants, "obedience was at the basis of all desirable characteristics of parenting (Calzada, 2010).
- ❖ Schoelmerich at all (1992) found cross-cultural differences in both parental values and parenting practices such as European American mothers attend to personal development (e.g. self-confidence, independence) in infant behavior, Whears Puerto Rican mothers tend to dimensions of respect (e.g. obedience, good behavior).



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Things to Consider When Working with The Latino Community (cont.)

- ❖ The meaning of attachment in the Latino community vs Western society may be different depending on the level of acculturation of the mother and child (Becerra, 2007).
- ❖ When working within the Latino community there is less importance put on teaching children how to process and share feelings.
- ❖ The way Latino caregivers display security and love is different than how European American parents.
- ❖ Social injustices such as poverty, poor housing conditions, and low paying work play a significant role on parenting styles (Becerra, 2007)

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Things to Consider When Working with The Latino Community (Cont.)

- ❖ The influence of a single parent household vs a dyad parent household.
- ❖ High number of divorce and separation in the Latino communities influence the importance of parenting.
- ❖ The importance of Familismo VS Independence.
- ❖ The emphasis of respect towards out elders.
- ❖ The view of independence when exploration is taking place.

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Basic Assumptions of the Attachment Model

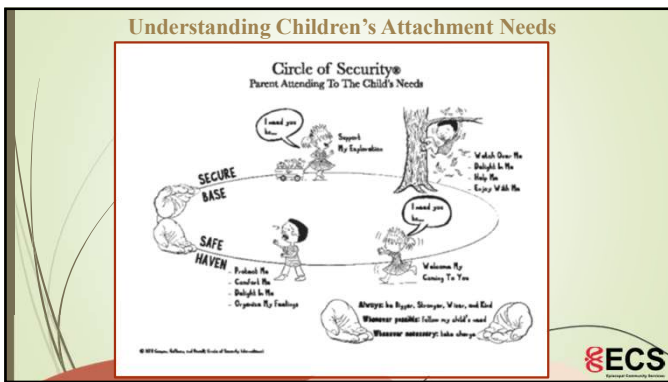
- ❖ “An important outcome of the ongoing interaction between parents and their child is that the child learns about himself and the world and what he can expect from others.” (Theraplay pg. 28)
- ❖ Working with both the child’s and the parent’s **internal working model**.
- ❖ When children experience a **secure attachment** where their emotions are accepted and supported, they develop both a positive self-image and internal mechanisms that helps them better regulate.

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The View of Play in the Latino Community

- ❖ Parents may have grown up in a harsh, unresponsive environment and as a result lack the emotional stamina needed for play or for nurturing. When presented with the attachment model that requires them to be playful, responsive, and nurturing, parents find it hard to connect with the end goal.
- ❖ If there was lack of play in their family history, caregivers may feel awkward playing with their children.

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The View of Play in the Latino Community

- ❖ Hispanic parents tend to be more reserved in their play an interactions with their children, and view Caucasian parents as more animated, energetic, and involved in their play and interactions with their children.
- ❖ Belief that children should entertain themselves or play with other children.

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Adapting Attachment Model to Fit the Cultural Needs of the Latino Family

- ❖ Collaborate with parents in order to modify intervention to accommodate cultural differences.
- ❖ Offer practical tools.
- ❖ Ease the parents into more playful interactions by leading and role-modeling.
- ❖ Support child with following the structure of the play activities while finding the type of play that the parent feels competent in.
- ❖ Attempt contact with other caregiver when appropriate.

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Engaging Latino Caregivers

- ❖ Learn and validate about the parent's definition of the problem.
- ❖ Let caregivers know that you see their struggle without trying to oversimplifying.
- ❖ Trusting relationships in the Latino community often require appropriate self-disclosure.
 - ❖ Establish a collaborative relationship
- ❖ Highlight the caregiver's strengths and knowledge of their child.


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Navigating Sensitivities

- ❖ Acknowledgement of the cultural structure that will continue to be a source of pressure outside of treatment setting.
- ❖ Avoid being confrontational or judgmental when exploring their parenting behaviors and beliefs.
- ❖ Explore their own early experiences with play and how they feel when they play with their children.




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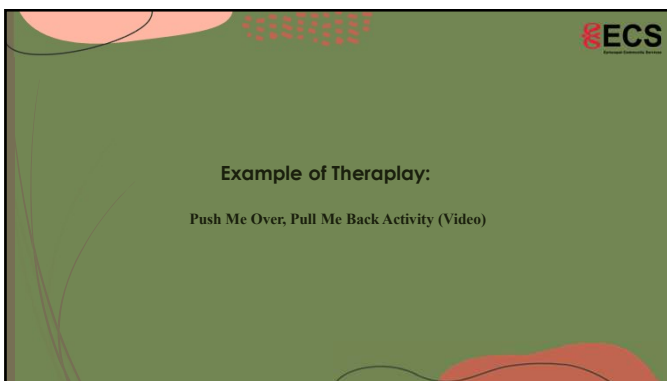
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Preparing Latino Parents for Play Sessions

- ❖ Psychoeducation on the importance of play.
- ❖ Practice some of games with the parent ahead of time to build the parents' confidence.
- ❖ Therapist needs to provide parents with the same attachment experience caregivers are to have with their child through the therapeutic relationship
- ❖ In the spirit of collaboration discuss ahead of time and give parent permission to "tap out" and sit back.



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Example of Theraplay:

Push Me Over, Pull Me Back Activity (Video)


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How Underlying Parental Issues May Manifest with Latino Families

- ❖ Parents feeling manipulated by their children.
- ❖ Resentful or angry for their child not being appreciative.
- ❖ They may feel jealous or in competition with their child.
- ❖ Fear of their child's emotional responses.
- ❖ Anger towards treatment professionals

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The Role of Generational Relational Patterns and Trauma

Generational relational patterns and trauma influences parenting and attachment styles. Parents' childhood unmet needs and ruptures in relationships, play a role in feeling overwhelmed by their child's need.

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The Role of Generational Relational Patterns and Trauma (Cont.)

Self-reflection, the ability to be aware of one-selves' actions and motives, is key in helping parents identify barriers to applying attachment base interventions.

Eliciting self-reflection:

- ❖ "Do you think your child knows when you are upset with them?"
- ❖ "How do they behave that lets you know this?"
- ❖ "How do they feel about you in that moment?"
- ❖ "What does your child need from you?"
- ❖ "How do you feel about yourself when they are behaving this way?"

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Empowering Parents

Similarly, help the parent identify where they see their strengths:

- ❖ “When do you feel closest to your child?”
- ❖ “How does your child see you in those moments?”
- ❖ “How do you see yourself?”

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Providing Self-Regulation Tools

Provide tools to deal with these anxieties (“shark music”) that interfere with the ability to meet their child’s need.

- ❖ Recognize the discomfort (“here is my shark music again”)
- ❖ Honor it. “I hurt now because it was not okay for me to have this need.”
- ❖ Respond to your child’s need (despite the discomfort)


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Good Enough

- ❖ The Latino community often perceives the Western culture style of parenting as over catering and “spoiling rotten”, fearing that tending to their child’s attachment needs as their child is having a meltdown will undermine their authority, make them look weak, and will reward acting-out behaviors.
- ❖ Highlight to parents that in order for a secure attachment to form a parent needs to be “good enough”.
- ❖ Good enough means getting it right 3 out of 10 times.



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Good Enough (Cont.)

- ❖ The 7 out of 10, known as ruptures, may look like:
 - Shaming, intimidation, distraction or redirect children away from feelings.



- ❖ "Good enough" (3 out of 10) entails "Being-With".
 - Being present and available when their child is experiencing difficult emotions while helping them co-regulate.

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