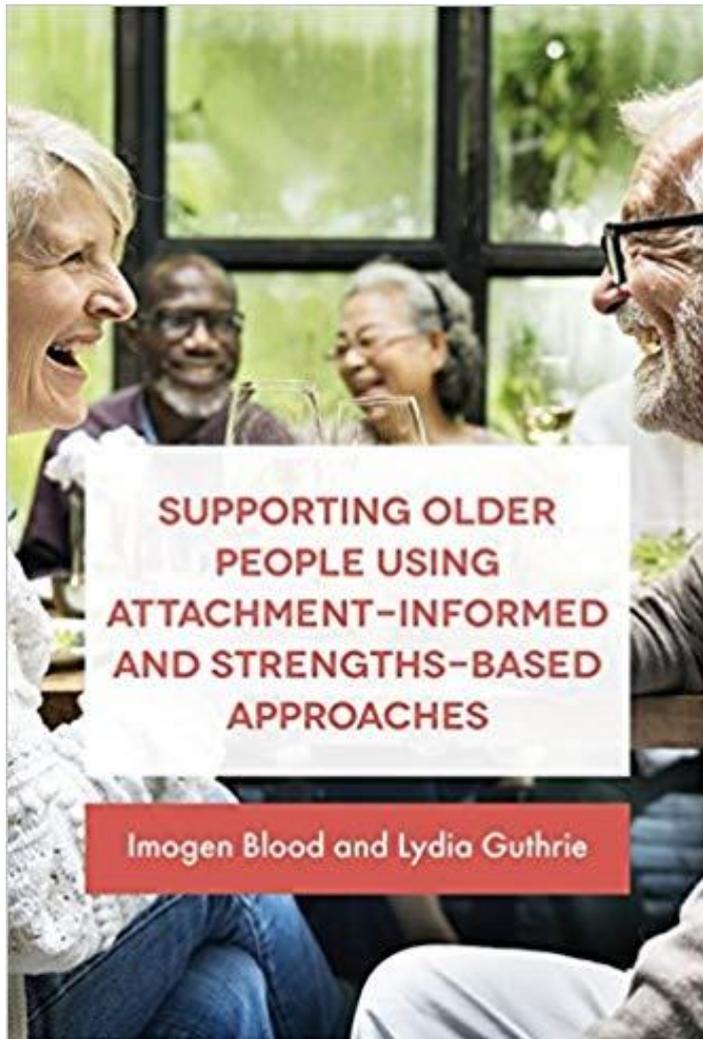


Supporting older people using attachment-informed approaches



Community Care Live

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Themes

- How an enhanced understanding of attachment theory can empower social care staff and improve the care and support of older people
- How attachment theory can help to support relationship-based practice with older people
- How attachment theory can help social care staff to work effectively with the wider family and social systems



**“If relationships are where things go wrong,
then relationships are where they are
going to be put right.” (Howe, 2011, IX)**

Challenges sometimes associated with older age

- Ill health
- Loss of loved ones
- Loneliness and isolation
- Coping with new environments
- Poverty
- Changing patterns in relationships:
receiving non-reciprocal care and support
- Experiences of age discrimination
- Changes to self-identity

Death and taxes...?

‘People like to think that old is different. They don’t like to be reminded of their own mortality’

Blood, 2013, p.17

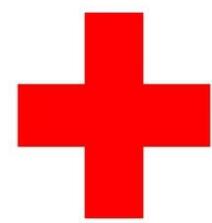
Social GRACES

- Gender
- Geography
- Race
- Religion
- Age
- Ability
- Appearance
- Accent
- Class
- Culture
- Ethnicity
- Employment
- Education
- Sexuality
- Sexual orientation
- Spirituality

(Burnham 2012)



Health Warning



The material we are about to discuss may cause you to reflect on your own strategies and your own life history of attachments, relationships and emotional coping.

It is not intended to cause you to beat yourself up about not being a 'perfect' parent, partner, friend, colleague, worker, sibling, son or daughter.

There is great value in attuned repair; the concept of being 'good enough' is well worth remembering when considering what follows!

What happens for you when you see this?



Attachment is about staying alive

- Attachment theory is a theory about how we gain protection and comfort in the face of danger – how we stay alive
- It is also a theory about how we form and sustain close, sexual relationships and reproduce the next generation – how we stay alive as a species (Crittenden, 2008)

How do infants adapt?

- Babies are born with powerful instincts to survive:
 - By signalling distress
 - By learning to adapt their signalling, based upon the pattern of responses they receive from their attachment figure
- The human infant develops new capacities and adaptations that work best with their particular attachment figure (s).

Three key attachment tasks for parents and carers (Crittenden, 2008)

- To protect and comfort children when the children cannot do this for themselves
- To guide children to protect and comfort themselves
- To let children take developmentally appropriate responsibility for themselves

How well a caregiver is able to meet their child's attachment needs depends on their capacity for collaborative, contingent and attuned communication with their children, especially during the early years.



What is attachment?

- Attachment theory looks at how an individual organises their behaviour and thinking in relationships in order to survive and to stay safe.
- It is not just another word to describe significant relationships. It is an individual's contribution to their key relationships; their way of influencing others to achieve safety, and protection from danger.

What is attachment?

- A unique, enduring, and affectively charged relationship (e.g. with a parent or a partner)
- A strategy for protecting oneself (of which there are three basic types A, B, and C)
- The pattern of information processing that underlies the strategies.

What do we mean by “a strategy”?

- Not necessarily conscious or planned
- Doing what we **believe** will make us safer in moments of **perceived** danger
- It is a matter of perception - a person can feel anxious or scared when there is no danger, or feel safe when under threat

Main features of information-processing that underlie attachment strategies

The brain connects us to our environment through the processing of internal and external stimuli, resulting in the organisation of behaviour (Crittenden, 2008).

Two sorts of information are crucial to safety and reproduction:

**Cognitive or external
(Eyebrows up)**



**Affective or internal
(Eyebrows down)**



Main features of information-processing that underlie attachment strategies



Cognitive or external information

*Where? When? Who?
What?*

This information tells the brain where and when danger has occurred in the past, and therefore where it might happen again.

Affective or internal information

Autonomic nervous system

This is information about the body's internal state; for example, heart rate, breathing, circulation, digestion, perspiration, muscle tension

Crittenden's Definition of Attachment

Attachment is a lifelong inter-personal strategy to respond to threat/danger which reflects an intra-personal strategy for processing information.

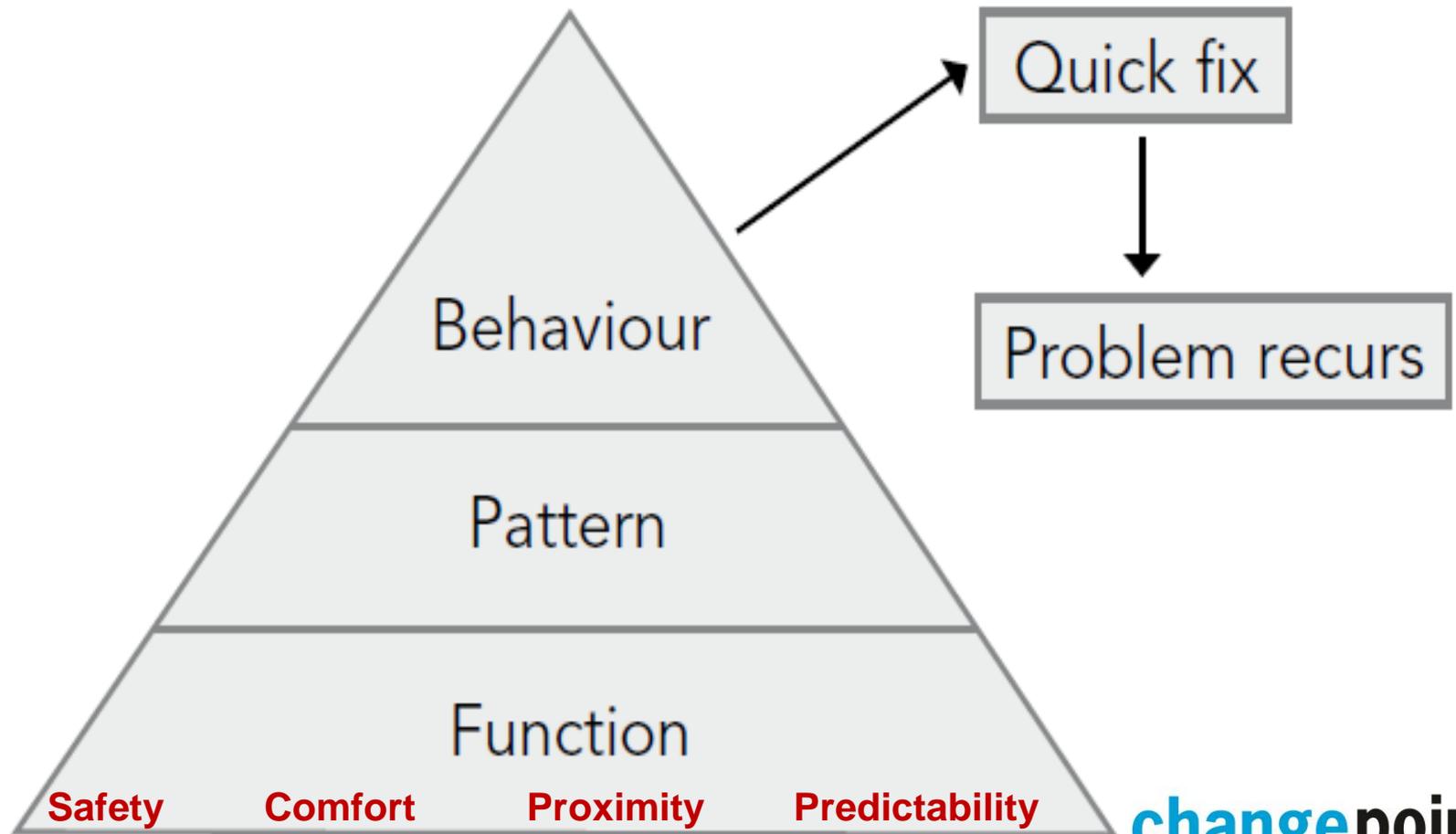
Attachment is a theory about danger, and how we organise in the face of it.

(Crittenden and Claussen 2003)

Four main drivers of the attachment system

- Faced with danger, we seek **safety**
- Faced with isolation, we seek **proximity**
- Faced with distress, we seek **comfort**
- Faced with chaos, we seek **predictability**
(or “the familiar”)

Meeting normal needs in problematic ways



Seeing strategies as strengths

- Attachment strategies are not 'good' or 'bad.'
- There are very significant cultural / social variations.
- What appears to be a 'broken' strategy may at one time in the person's life been the only strategy they knew to survive.

Note: 'B' does not stand for 'best'!

'B' offers the most flexibility in a context of safety and comfort. However, in situations of...

- danger, or perceived danger, OR
- lack of predictability

...a non-'B' strategy may be **necessary for survival**.

Hence, 'A' and 'C' strategies have their important place and can be seen as the person's extraordinary intelligence, prudence and savvy in surviving in dangerous surroundings

(Crittenden & Claussen, 2003)

Predictability and Attunement





Type B Infancy

- Predictable and attuned care from attachment figure
- Aligned states of mind –contingent communication
- Process of co-regulation
- Learns to trust predictive nature of thoughts and feelings



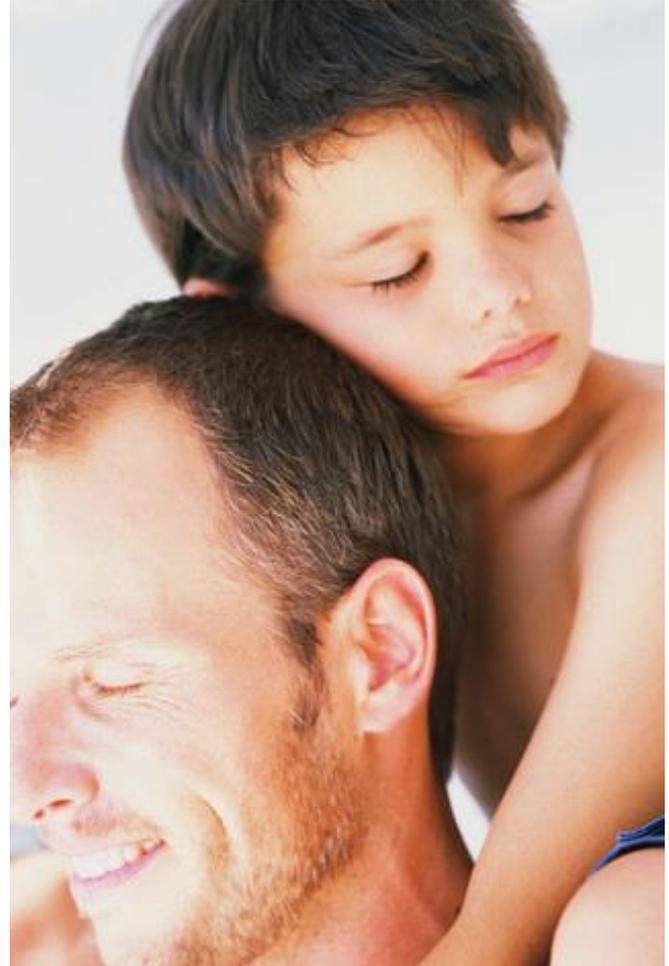
Type B - balanced

- Accurate display of positive & negative affect
- Use thoughts and feelings to guide behaviour
- Clear & reciprocal communication of feelings and intentions
- Cooperative relationship with attachment figure
- Able to accept comfort

Type B development

- Recognise attachment figure has own thoughts/feelings
- Can differentiate own perspective
- Collaborative approach
- Capacity to reflect – mentalization
- Self worth, trust and competence







Type A infancy

- Predictable but unattuned responses from attachment figure
- Infant learns to inhibit own negative affect (emotions which the attachment figure cannot tolerate)
- Relies on predictable contingencies (if/then) – thoughts not feelings to guide behaviour

Type A: 'How can I please you?'

- Inhibit own negative feelings
- Split positive/negative affect
- Show false positive affect
- Steady state to prevent rejection
- 'too good' child –
praised and reinforced



Type A development

- Inhibition, withdrawal
- Care taking of parent, role reversal
- Compliance, compulsive achievement
- Social and/or sexual promiscuity
- Self reliance

Type A risks

- Inhibition
- Vigilance
- Passivity
- Impact on educational experiences
- Compulsion –attention, care giving, performance
- Isolation/depression
- Social and/or emotional promiscuity
- Somatic symptoms – dismissed
- Intrusion of forbidden negative affect- outbursts

Type C Infancy

- Unpredictable and inconsistently attuned responses from attachment figure
- Confusing for infant – can not predict if attachment figure will comfort them if distressed
- Exaggerating the display increases chance of a response
- Keep changing the problem to keep their attachment figure close
- Learn that own feelings are the most useful information

Type C: 'if I feel it, then it's true'

- Alternate displays of affect to regulate others behaviour
- Anger & desire for comfort as aggression and coyness
- Attachment figure habituates so have to increase risk to elicit protection



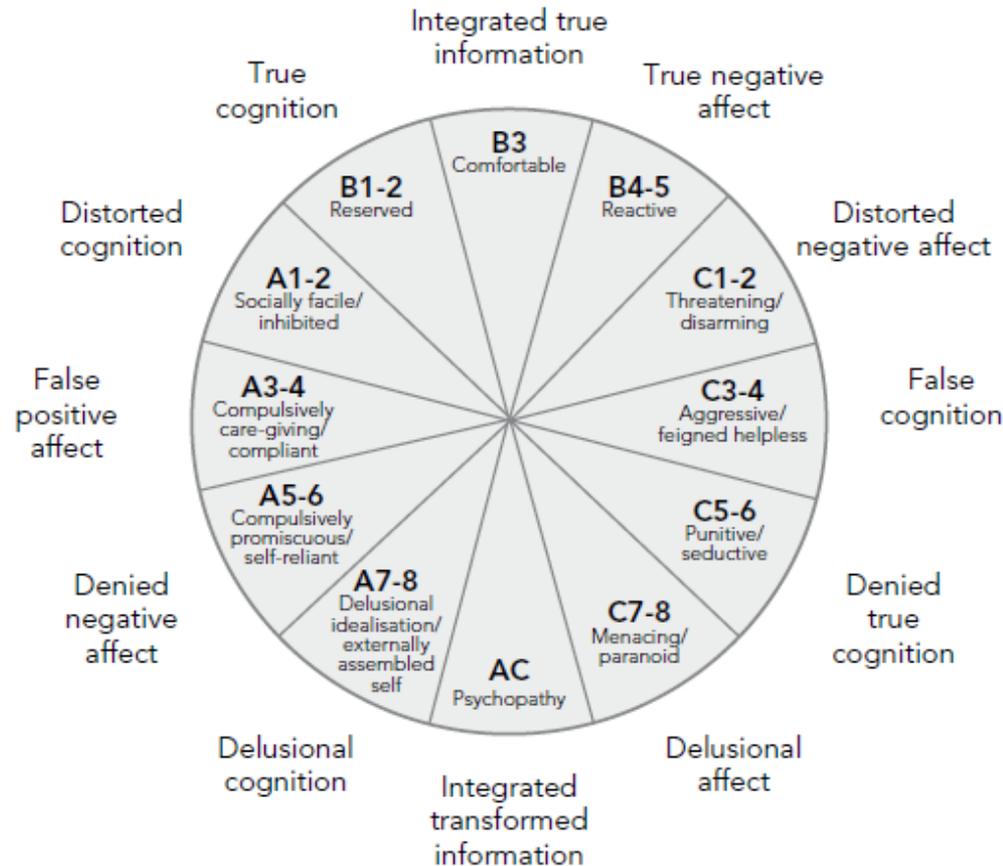
Type C development

- Increase provocative behaviour (attachment figure habituates)
- Alternate with coyness (when attachment figure gets angry)
- Aggression/feigned helplessness
- Punitive/seductive behaviour

Type C risks

- Emotional intensity/lability
- Attentional problems
- Hyperactivity
- Provocative behaviour
- Risk taking/accident prone
- Social rejection
- Coy shyness
- Somatic symptoms – exaggerated

Crittenden's Dynamic-Maturational Model of Attachment and Adaptation



Critiques of attachment theory

- It's deterministic – “all done by the time you're 3 years old”
- It doesn't take account of our ability to change/adapt over our life course
- It's Eurocentric
- Social work is about communities, not just individuals
- It focuses on the psycho- at the expense of the social

Relationship-based practice

The relationship is:

‘the medium through which the practitioner can engage with the complexity of an individual’s internal and external worlds and intervene.’

Ruch, 2005, p113

Relationship-based practice

‘The practitioner–client relationship is recognized to be an important source of information for the practitioner to understand how best to help, and simultaneously this relationship is the means by which any help or intervention is offered.’

Ruch, 2005, p113

The Policy Context

- The Care Act 2014 requires local authorities to ‘consider the person’s own strengths and capabilities, and what support might be available from their wider support network or within the community to help’
- How might contemporary attachment theory be compatible with this?

Attachment theory and caring

Over 60% of people with dementia are cared for by family members at home, most commonly by a partner or adult daughter

Prince et al, 2014

Caregivers can experience “ambiguous loss” – a sense that their loved one is both present and absent at the same time due to the impacts of older age and/or illness

Boss, 1999

Attachment theory and caring

- Attachment style was the only significant predictor of caregiving difficulties and psychological strain in children who were caring for parents

Hazan and Shaver 1990

- An adult child with a Type B secure strategy is more able to care for their parent in a sensitive and attuned way

Chen et al, 2013

Attachment theory and caring

- Attachment strategies of the caregiver influence both the levels of distressed behaviour from the person with dementia, and the wellbeing of the caregiver
- Type A strategies were associated with expressions of agitation from their partner, and carers were less likely to say that they were coping well with caregiving.

Perren et al, 2007

Factors linked with positive caregiving experiences

- A sense of personal accomplishment and gratification
- Feelings of mutuality: taking pleasure in shared connection
- An increase of family cohesion and support
- A sense of personal growth and purpose in life

Yu et al, 2018

Attachment theory and caring

- Families are complex emotional systems
- When an older family member begins to need support, it is likely that new patterns of interaction will develop
- Family interactions are loops and spirals, rather than straight lines
- Familiar family scripts may be challenged

Transitions in family life

- All families experience challenges during transitional stages
- Change for one family member usually requires a renegotiation in relationships with other family members
- Different family members may have different attitudes to change, which can lead to conflict

Practical ideas for supporting families who are caring for an older adults

- What is the biggest threat? What are they most worried about?
- Can you help to build a sense of safety?
- Use a strengths-based approach to help family members to recognise their strengths and expertise
- Try to remain neutral – retain your manoeuvrability for change

Practical ideas for supporting families who are caring for an older adults

- Help the family to find meaning
- Help the family to focus on what remains (we-ness)
- Offer practical support
- Reflect on your own emotions
- Learn everything you can about the family's social context
- If you get it wrong, make a repair

Attachment-informed end of life care

- Importance of workers helping people to have a secure base at the end of life (Loetz et al, 2013)
- Elements of secure base:
 - Inner peace and hope
 - Sense of identity
 - Physical environment – safety and comfort
 - Surrounded by people and possessions which matter to us

Attachment informed practice in care homes

- Moving into a home, receiving care from others, and living alongside new people can represent a threat to the attachment system
- Even if we do not fully understand a person's life story, we can use human relationships to help them to feel safer
- Many homes are “safe but lonely” (Slettebø 2008)

Snoezelen approach

- Sensorial identity cards are devised for each individual
- Sensory based activities are used at times of stress (chronic pain, end of life, etc)
e.g: lights, sounds, textures, smells, touch
- Effective for reducing symptoms of dementia (Bonora et al, 2011)

Supporting people to repair relationships

- Many older people reflected upon ruptured relationships (Blood et al, 2016)
- Much of the literature focuses on developing new relationships, rather than repairing older ones.
- Rupture in relationships is usually due to unmet needs – not feeling valued, respected, listened to

Supporting people to repair relationships

- The aim of repair is to restore equilibrium, rather than to assign blame. Resist the role of the referee!
- Validate the story and the emotions
- Help them to consider alternative versions
- Reflect on how they feel now
- Offer to act as go-between
- Proceed with caution and reflection, and above all with collaboration

Organisational culture

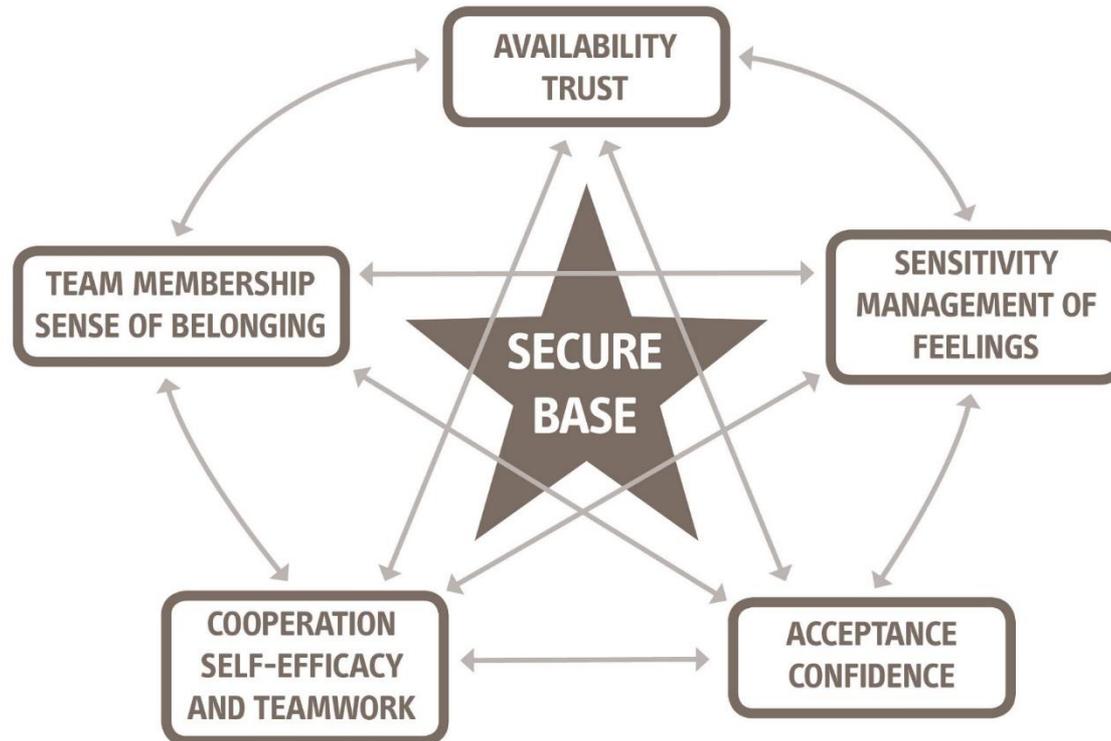
- How attachment-informed are our organisational cultures?
- How safe do we feel in our professional arrangements?
- How can supervision relationships help to promote relational safety?

Organisational culture

‘Person centred values become translated into person centred behaviours only when organisational cultures promote these values through everyday practices.’

Killett et al, 2016

Team as a Secure Base Model (Biggart, 2016)



How can attachment theory be useful in adult social care?

- Consider how “difficult” behaviour or stuck patterns may represent the client’s best attempt to meet their needs for safety, comfort, predictability and proximity
- Consider relationship patterns in the wider system, including you
- If the direct client has limited capacity to reflect, try to work with those around them

Further study

Websites:

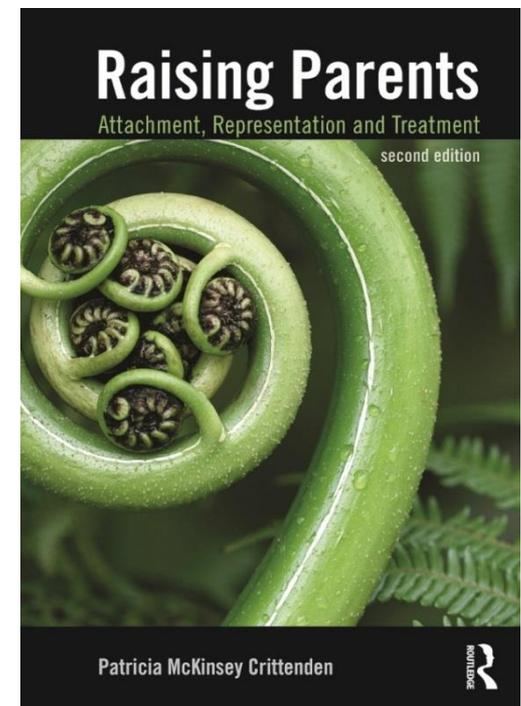
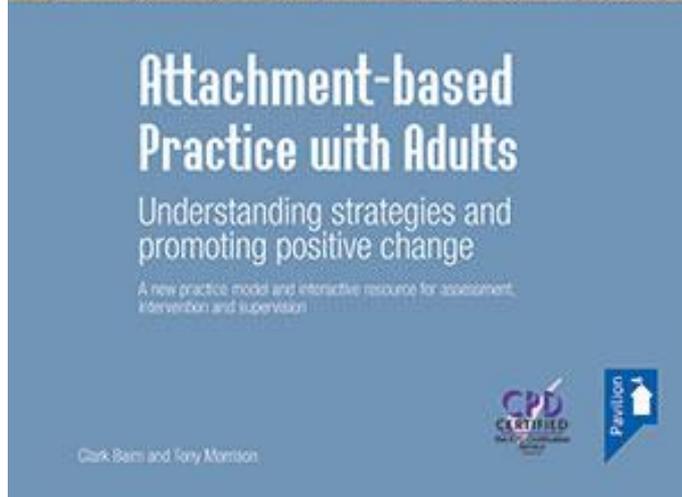
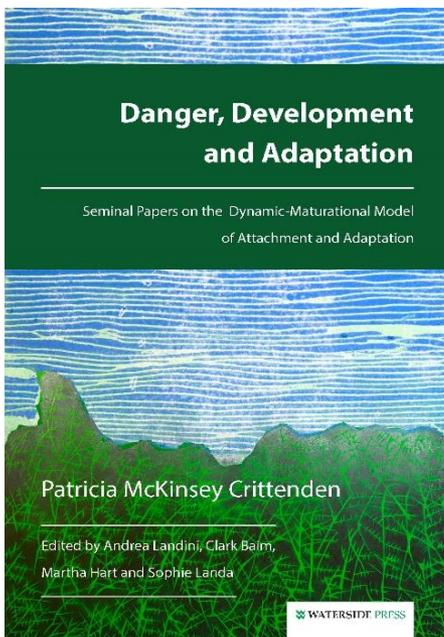
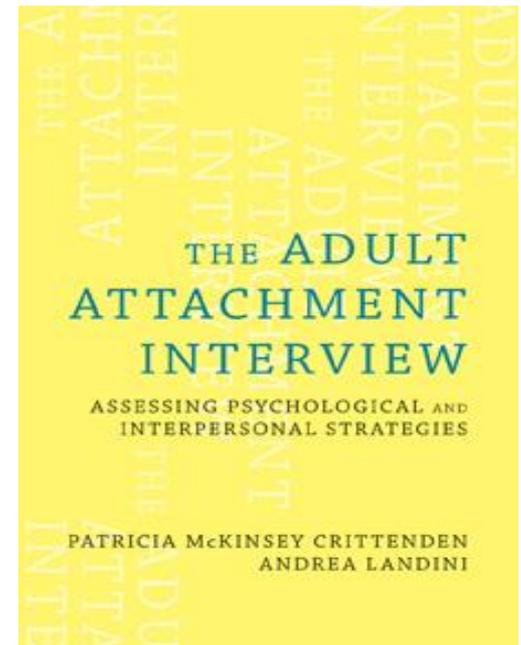
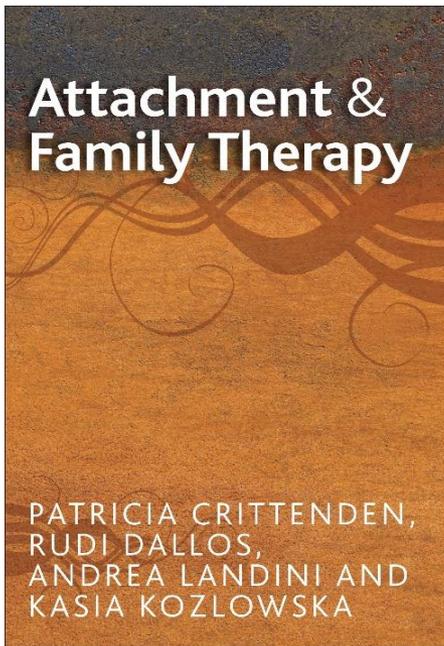
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