



# Why should children have secure attachments? Literature review of the importance of attachment in child development

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**Abstract.** Secure attachment is an essential asset for children, and insecure attachment is a danger element for children. However, unfortunately, there are still many young children who have insecure attachments. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the importance of attachment in child development. The research method used is a systematic literature review. The results showed that secure attachment enabled children to face new social situations based on a sense of trust in later developmental periods and increased cognitive and social-emotional development (emotional regulation, socialization, and independence). Children with insecure attachments tend to model themselves as incompetent, insecure, and hostile play interactions, and negative experiences with caregivers primarily affect children's beliefs and expectations about future interactions. Therefore, children's secure attachment needs to be increased at home with a primary attachment figure (usually the mother) and at school with a secondary attachment figure (the teacher). This research contributes to understanding early childhood attachment and its influence on other aspects of development, especially social-emotional and cognitive development.

**Keywords:** secure attachment, insecure attachment, child development.

## 1 Introduction

Attachment is important for the achievement of all aspects of child development. Attachment is a deep emotional bond/affection formed by an individual with other people that is specific, binding them in an eternal closeness over time and across space and time [1], [2]. The attachment appears in the first years of a child's life. Sticky behavior generally occurs at the age of approximately 7 months or in the age range of 5-15 months. However, the emergence of this clingy behavior can also be inhibited or slower if there is extreme social deprivation. The thing that accelerates the emergence of clingy behavior is a caring home environment.

Ideally, all children have secure attachments. However, in reality, early childhood who have insecure attachments are still quite high. The World Health Organization claims that, about 55% of children are categorized as the secure attachment and about 43% of children are categorized as an insecure attachment which is divided into 3 attachment patterns, namely: about 20% of children are included in the *insecure-avoidant* group (insecure-ambivalent attachment) and about 8% of children were in the *insecure-disorganized* group (irregular type insecure attachment) [3]. The results of other studies indicate that about half (50% to 60%) have a secure attachment, another quarter (20% to 23%) have an avoidant insecure attachment, and the remainder have insecure/resistant attachment (8% to 10%) or disorganized insecure attachment (10% to 24%) [4]. Early childhood attachment in Indonesia in 2016, especially in Bogor, showed that almost three-fifths of mothers (61.0%) had mother-child attachment which was categorized as insecure (*insecure attachment*) and only 39.0% had mother-child secure attachment (*secure attachment*) [5].

Insecure attachment in early childhood causes various problems in the future. Insecure attachment between infants and their caregivers can cause sleep disturbances in infants [6], insecure attachments in 17-month-old infants will have an effect on negative play interactions with peers at the age of 4 years, which in turn causes more problems. externalization at the age of 6 years [7], insecure attachment coupled with parental violence in childhood can lead to depression in adulthood [8], leading to impaired physical health in childhood [9], causing paranoia [10], being a significant predictor of aggressive behavior [11], as well as being a predictor of suicidal ideation in adulthood [12]. This proves that there is a long-term influence between early childhood attachment and various problems in adulthood.

Attachment is included in the aspect of social-emotional development. Socio-emotional development is an important aspect that needs to be considered both at home and school. But unfortunately, children's social and emotional needs are ignored in school, because most schools are busy with cognitive, literacy, and numeracy abilities, although there have been many studies on the importance of a curriculum that strengthens social and emotional competence [13]. Approximately 8.0 to 9.0 percent of early childhood experience problems regarding social-emotional problems such as insecure attachment to parents/caregivers, feelings of anxiety, depression, disobedient behavior, lack of peer relationships, lack of social skills, and academic performance poor [14].

Research on early childhood attachment and its relationship to several aspects of development has been carried out in various countries. Children's attachments have a positive correlation with children's social competence [15], attachment affects children's behavioral dependence on teachers in preschool [16], and children's safe basic scripts affect children's internalizing and externalizing behavior [17].

Several other studies on child attachment have also been conducted. These include research on the importance of forming secure attachments in infancy and toddlerhood [18], increasing children's secure attachment to their parents through dance activities together [19], and increasing children's social-emotional development and teacher-student secure attachment through love, kindness, and forgiveness [20].

This study is different from previous studies. Novelty in this study is the importance of secure attachment for early childhood and its relation to other developmental aspects.

This study also discusses steps to increase children's secure attachment both at home and at school. Children ideally have a secure attachment to their parents or caregivers at home. Children also need to have a good close relationship with teachers at school, or teachers/caregivers in daycare.

Regarding the subject of the study, it is specific, namely the findings of research on early childhood attachment and its implications for child development. This research uses a systematic literature review approach to answering research questions. A systematic review is a comprehensive review of all published articles selected to answer specific questions using a systematic method to identify relevant studies to minimize bias and error [21].

*Several research questions (RQ) serve as the foundation for this systematic literature review.*

RQ 1: What are the strategies to increase early childhood secure attachment?

RQ 2: How does attachment affect other aspects of development?

Some of the procedures carried out to ensure that the reviews that researchers carry out are systematic, as follows [22]:

Establishing the scope of the review: the researcher begins by creating clear standards for selecting studies about early childhood attachment what literature will be included in the will be considered in the analysis.

Researchers locate pertinent studies by searching the literature. The Scopus database was the one used in this systematic literature review. The researcher's first action is to develop keywords that are pertinent to this study. The researcher uses the following keywords: (secure and attachment AND early AND childhood) obtained data from as many as 323 articles.

Screening the literature: each literature was screened according to the inclusion criteria. This helps avoid hidden bias, by having clear consistent rules about which studies to use to answer research questions. By assessing each study against the same criteria and recording the results, the basis for the review's conclusions is made transparent. The following are the inclusion and exclusion criteria applied in this study:

a) At least one of the research questions must be addressed by the literature. namely strategies to increase children's secure attachment at home and at school, and the influence of attachment on other aspects of development.

b) The literature has been released in a wide of 2018-2022.

c) Empirical study, both qualitative and quantitative, is the foundation of literature.

d) Research methods in the literature reviewed are described explicitly.

e) Literature reviewed are included in the subjects of psychology, social science, and arts and humanities.

The results were then narrowed down by using the 2018-2022 timeframe and subjects in Psychology, Social Science, Art, and Humanities with the keywords (secure and attachment AND early AND childhood) AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2022) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2021) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2020) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2019) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2018)) AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, "PSYC") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, "SOCI") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, "ARTS")).

Explain and map the literature reviewed: the researcher describes the research methods and findings from each of the included studies, including variables such as study design, research questions, and population focus. This step is useful for constructing a 'descriptive map' which provides a systematic description of the research activities related to each research question [23].

Evaluating the literature's applicability using predetermined criteria and relevance assessment: at this stage the researcher carefully assesses each study in a descriptive map.

Making a synthesis of all the findings of the literature, the researcher synthesizes all the articles that meet the criteria set out in this research.

Drawing research conclusions and recommendations: the researcher concludes the results of the study and makes some suggestions and recommendations related to the findings of the synthesis to make a clear basis for each suggestion and recommendation made. This step includes identifying potential limitations in generalization as well as other research limitations.

### 1.1 Early Childhood Attachments.

The attachment was first developed by John Bowlby in 1958. Bowlby defines attachment as the emotional bond that infants build and elaborate with their primary caregivers in the context of routine everyday interactions. This bond is specific because it is directed to a particular individual, is durable, and binds both individuals together across contexts [24]. Ainsworth defines attachment as a lasting bond of influence that unites one person to another over time and across space [25]. Bowlby stated that infants demonstrate their closeness to their mother through several types of behavior such as sucking, following, crying, and smiling [24], [26], [27]. This bond of affection is effective, so attachment tends to remain in the individual, even though the attachment figure is not physically visible or is not within reach.

Attachment is characterized by a tendency to seek and strengthen closeness to certain characters, especially when the child is in a stressful condition. Since its inception in 1958, attachment theory has become an influential theoretical framework for studying the social, emotional, and relationship development of individuals [28].

Bowlby's main thesis is that human mothers and babies have an instinct that develops to form strong emotional bonds, which if never made, or if broken within the first three years (which he considers a 'sensitive period') will become emotional problems for the future. subsequent child development [29].

A key feature of the Bowlby-Ainsworth perspective is the role that is associated with real-life experiences in the relationship between the infant and the mother or caregiver. According to Bowlby, in the context of interaction infants develop a preference for regulating their behavior in the surrounding environment, and become attached to their primary caregiver. This experience provides a basis for the later representation of the bonding relationship between children and individuals, and for the maintenance or change of that representation. The experience of interaction plays a key role in attachment theory and was the starting point of traditional psychoanalytic theory at the time Bowlby proposed his theory [28].

## 1.2 Increase attachment with children

The number of childcare programs as well as children's boarding schools raises questions about the attachment of infants and early childhood. Parents worry that their child will not be close to them, and worse, they are afraid that their baby/child will develop a closer relationship with their caregivers than with them. However, children may become attached to more than one person, and attachments can occur with more than one person at the same time. Babies are close to their parents as their primary teachers and guardians, thus creating a hierarchy of closeness in which subsequent close relationships are not of equal value. Babies still show the closest relationship with the primary caregiver, usually the mother [30].

Increasing children's attachment to parents can be done with several strategies, namely sensitive responsive parenting [2], open and direct communication with children, giving attention, care, and sufficient time with children [18]. Meanwhile, in schools, early childhood teachers and daycare caregivers must also build attachments with students. Affective teacher/caregiver and positive relationships among them enhance children's social and emotional, and cognitive development, especially in childhood [31]. Warm and positive interactions encourage children's feelings of security and foster trust, comfort, or balance to explore the classroom environment [32].

## 2 Research result

Search results for related literature in the Scopus database, using keywords that the researcher has created (secure and attachment AND early AND childhood), obtained data from as many as 323 articles. The results were then condensed using the period from 2018 to 2022. and subjects in Psychology, Social Science, Art, and Humanities with the keywords (secure and attachment AND early AND childhood) AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2022) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2021) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2020) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2019) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2018)) AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, "PSYC") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, "SOC") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, "ARTS")).

From this process, data were obtained in 96 articles. Additionally, the 96 publications' results were narrowed down by their reading and analyzing abstracts. From this approach, the researchers eliminated 50 studies that didn't fit the bill, leaving only 46. Only 24 pieces of literature met the inclusion requirements once the researcher had read the entire text.

**Table 1.** Summary of Analyzed Literature

No	Author	Year	Context
1.	Fernandes et al.	2018	Child attachment development by sex
2.	Goodman et al.	2018	Effects of early childhood attachment to suicidal ideation in adulthood in Kenya.
3.	Ludolph, P. S.	2018	The importance of building parental attachment with children in infancy and toddler
4.	Manning, LB	2018	Effect of changes in parental sensitivity to child attachment at an early age
5.	O'Connor et al.	2018	Parental sensitive responses in early childhood have a lasting effect on representations of attachment in adolescence.
6.	Woodhouse, S. S.	2018	Attachment-based interventions for families with early childhood.
7.	Bernard, K.	2019	Insecure (irregular) attachment at an early age has an impact on physical health later in life
8.	Haslip et al.	2019	Love, kindness, and forgiveness promote social-emotional development and teacher-student attachment.
9.	Nichols et al.	2019	Representation of children's attachments is related to adaptive functioning during early childhood.
10.	Ruiz et al.	2019	The effect of safe basic script knowledge on children's internalizing and externalizing behavior.
11.	Vaughn et al.	2019	Representation of attachment and social competence during early childhood.
12.	Vaughn et al	2019	Measuring the secure attachment of early childhood with the storytelling method.
13.	Waters, H. W.	2019	The relationship between attachment and social competence in early childhood.
14.	Cetin et al.	2020	Parental attachment to their parents and their children's creativity.
15.	Change, M. & Bond, S.	2020	Development of the four quadrants: belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity in child care and youth to increase secure attachment.
16.	Fine et al.	2020	Positive parenting on adoptive parents of Chinese children.
17.	McMahon, C. A., & Maxwell, AM	2020	The effectiveness of psychotherapy interventions on the safe attachment of children with depressed mothers
18.	Macagno, A., & Molina, P.	2020	Professional Caregiver Attachment Diary (PCAD) to describe the adaptation process of children in daycare.
19.	Neuhaus, et al.	2020	Child attachment affects child-teacher dependency behavior in preschool.
20.	Opie et al.	2020	Attachment stability in infancy, toddlerhood, and preschool.
21.	Tibi et al.	2020	Childhood trauma and attachment styles predict a four-year course of obsessive-compulsive disorder.
22.	Muscat, L.	2021	Increase mother-daughter secure attachment by dancing together.
23.	Busmans et al.	2022	VIPP-SD to promote sensitive parenting and secure attachment in early childhood, and MCAT to stimulate secure attachment in middle childhood.
24.	Whittenberg et al.	2022	Secure attachment in early childhood may serve as a protective factor in the context of parental risk

Then the researchers used the literature to answer the research questions that the researchers formulated earlier. In this study, the researcher asked 2 research questions, namely how the strategy to increase children's attachment both at school and at home and early childhood attachment and its relationship with other developmental aspects.

## 2.1 Strategies to increase children's attachment at home and school.

The results from the complete body of literature that were used to address the first research question (RQ1) can be divided into two areas about strategies to increase children attachment. *First* strategies to increase children's attachment to parents at home, and *second*, strategies to increase children's attachment to school.

Strategies to increase children's attachment to parents at home are: (1) by having a high concern for children and providing sufficient time for each parent with children, especially in infancy and toddlers to grow attachments, including children whose parents do not live in the same house [18], (2) with several attachment-based interventions to support parents, improve the quality of care, and promote child attachment safety to improve children's mental health children in China [33], (3) used CPP intervention (*Child Parent Psychotherapy*) to increase children's attachment to depressed mothers [34]. This CPP intervention is certainly carried out by professionals in the clinic who help treat depressed mothers.

Some of the research results above generally state that to increase the attachment of children with parents at home, it is with sensitive, caring parenting, providing sufficient time for children, especially in infancy and toddlers. Children's first three years of life are a sensitive periods for attachment development, during which infants and toddlers can only grow and develop to their full potential if they continue to feel secure in the care of loving parents. [24]. If at this time the formation of attachment is ignored by parents or disconnected, it will have a psychological impact in the future [29].

In addition to the increasing attachment to parents at home, children also need to increase attachment to teachers at school. This is to research conducted by Haslip et al (2019) which states that love, peace, and forgiveness in interactions at school and in classroom learning can increase teacher attachment to early childhood and also improve children's social-emotional development [20]. Next, Chimange & Bond (2020) develops four quadrants, namely ownership, mastery, independence, and generosity in child care and youth to increase secure attachment [35]. The development of these four quadrants is carried out by creating a friendly environment, directing young people to child and youth care centers, meeting children's physiological needs, setting rules and boundaries, expressing affection for young people in parenting, physical contact, and explaining the circumstances that unite them.

A study conducted by Macagno & Molina (2020) increased attachment in child care using the Professional Caregiver Attachment Diary (PCAD) to describe the adaptation process of children in daycare [36]. The PCAD is a structured diary, in which professional caregivers record daily the behaviors children exhibit in certain stressful situations that can give rise to attachment behavior, to follow the relationship with the development of caregivers at the childcare center during the early months of attendance. This diary makes it easier for caregivers to evaluate a child's attachment development.

Next, Neuhaus et al (2020) examine child-teacher dependence in preschool as a pathway by which mother-child attachment is associated with children's behavioral problems in middle childhood [16]. Children with secure attachment are less dependent on the teacher, but children with insecure attachment have a higher dependence on the teacher. Teachers reduce children's dependence on the school to improve the risk of internalizing behavior caused by feelings of insecurity.

## **2.2 Child attachment and its relationship to other aspects of development**

Research on child attachment and its relationship to other aspects of development has been carried out in several countries. Goodman et al (2018) investigated the effect of early childhood attachment on suicidal ideation in adulthood in Kenya. Establishing secure attachments at an early age can prevent the emergence of suicidal ideation in adulthood [12]. O'Connor et al (2018) investigated that sensitive parental responses in early childhood have a lasting effect on representations of attachment in adolescence [4]. High parental sensitivity is one of the factors for the formation of a child's secure attachment to parents, on the other hand, if parents are not sensitive, the child will have an insecure attachment.

The results of the two studies above state that insecure attachment to children has an impact on mental health in the future. In addition to having an impact on mental health, insecure attachment to children also has an impact on physical health. This is to research conducted by Bernard (2019), that insecure/disorganized attachment in infancy has a higher level of inflammation in early childhood/preschool [9]. Next, Nichols et al (2019) investigated children's attachment to adaptive function [38]. The research headed to evaluate the relationship between the application of SBS (Secure base script) and various domains interactions between teachers and students, complete control over effort, executive functioning, and linguistic intelligence are all examples of adaptive functioning. The findings indicate that early childhood adaptive performance is intimately tied to children's internal conceptions of attachment.

Another study conducted by Ruiz et al (2019) examined the effect of knowledge of secure basic scripts on children's internalizing and externalizing behavior [17]. Child secure baseline scripts serve as an effective focal point for risk assessment and intervention initiatives targeted at lowering behavioral maladaptation in children exposed to stress. Vaughn et al (2019), examined the representation of children's attachment to social competence in the future. Secure base script scores have a positive and significant relationship with social competence in adulthood [39], [40]. Waters (2019) also examines the correlation between attachment and social competence [15]. The research hypothesis is that the knowledge of a secure base script built on the experience of a babysitter is the main point. The findings revealed a substantial correlation between children's secure base scripts and other related social/cognitive characteristics, including social competence.



### 3 limitations

The limitations in this study are using only one indexing source, Scopus and the time limit is only the last five years. For further research, it is possible to review articles from several journal indexers as well as a longer range of years.

### 4 Conclusion

A child's first three years of life are a delicate time for developing attachment. Increasing the attachment of children to their parents at home is carried out by caring for sensitive, caring, and having sufficient time for children. Increasing the attachment of children with teachers at school can be done through various behaviors in interaction such as forgiveness, love, peace, belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. These various behaviors are implemented in learning in the classroom and outside the classroom.

Various studies in this article examine attachment and its relationship to aspects of social-emotional development (competence, adaptive function, peer relations, teacher-child relationships), physical health, and mental health. The relationship with aspects of language, cognitive, moral, and artistic development has not been found in this study. Early childhood attachment should be an aspect that needs to be considered both at home and school.

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