

## Consequences of Attachment: Overview

Security, an outgrowth of sensitively responsive caregiving during infancy, has proven an optimal component of individual development. During **toddlerhood** (2-3 years of age), secure children are more autonomous, flexible, resourceful, cheerful, enthusiastic, capable of using their mothers to assist them without being overly dependent upon them, and cooperative despite their willingness to freely express and exert their independent will, than are their insecure agemates. As **preschoolers**, secure children, as compared to insecure counterparts, are more ego resilient and independent, have higher levels of self-esteem, more positive social skills, more friends, and more empathy toward their peers. Insecure preschoolers tend to be aggressive, victimized, unpredictable, disruptive, and unpopular in the eyes of their peers.

During **middle childhood** (7-12 years), differences between secure and insecure children are apparent largely in the context of social relationships. Secure children are very adept at forming and maintaining close friendships characterized by mutual caring, respect, and, when necessary, effective conflict resolution. Insecure children have difficulties forming such friendships, and relationships with peers that are formed may be characterized by over-dependence and jealousy. Also during this stage, insecure children, particularly boys, tend to be characterized by a variety of problem behaviors such as hostility, noncompliance, hyperactivity, nervous habits, or unhappiness.

During **adolescence**, secure teens are capable of speaking coherently and thoughtfully about their close relationships, particularly those with their parents. As compared to their insecure counterparts, secure adolescents are better able to handle conflicts with their parents, more adept at transitioning to college, and more capable of finding an optimal balance between numerous and varied age-appropriate demands (e.g., coping with stress, studying, and enjoying themselves). Insecure teens are much more limited in their abilities to access and express their thoughts and/or feelings associated with close relationships, and tend to be more hostile, condescending, and/or anxious in interactions with peers than are secure adolescents.

Many facets of **adulthood** also are affected by attachment, including marriage, parenting, and even the experience of pregnancy. Marriage represents an important attachment relationship, and the steadily growing rate of divorce in our country serves as testament to the fact that not all marriages are successful. From an

attachment perspective, a good marriage epitomizes all that is necessary and important in establishing healthy, mature relationships. For individuals who are secure in their sense of having been loved, and confident in their ability to both give and get love, there also is a confidence in seeking a partner who can and will fulfill their attachment needs. And indeed there is some evidence that secure adults tend to seek out and marry secure partners. Additionally, such couples (secure-secure) are more satisfied with their marriages, and these relationships last longer than do marriages involving either one or both insecure partners.

Consideration of pregnancy and parenting serves to demonstrate the importance both of being capable of relying on someone, and of having someone to rely on, as factors which contribute to successful coping in the face of immense demands. Women who display secure characteristics of being able to directly seek support and assistance from appropriate persons are likely to fare well during pregnancy, experiencing fewer complications during pregnancy, labor, and delivery. These women also are likely to have a satisfying relationship with their husbands, (as explained above) which itself serves as a primary source of support. Conversely, when women are not confident that support will be available to them, and thus have difficulty seeking such support or do so in a negative (e.g., aggressive, demanding) manner, emotional difficulties during pregnancy are more likely. It is not surprising based on this information that problems associated with insecurity would continue to show themselves beyond the birth of the child. Mothers who themselves are insecure and thus are likely to be in a marital relationship that is not viewed by them as satisfying, are likely to behave toward their infants in an insensitive manner, thus fostering an insecure attachment. Secure mothers, on the other hand, would be likely to enjoy a satisfying and supportive marital relationship, and to foster security with their infants via their willingness and ability to meet infants' needs in a sensitively responsive manner.