The tie between parent and child with significant developmental delay

Exploring home observed attachment behaviour

Sien Vandevenaet
Prof. Dr. Bea Maes
Prof. Dr. Guy Bosmans
Prof. Dr. Carlo Schuengel
Dr. Paula Sterkenburg

Content

1) Attachment & intellectual disabilities: Is that important?
   Theoretical background

2) Do children with significant developmental delay differentiate their attachment behaviour towards parents?
   Discussion of the paper

3) How does this fit into the doctoral project: 't Klikt!
   Embedding in larger project

1) Attachment in children with an intellectual disability: Is that important?

   Theoretical background
Attachment & mental health

At risk for mental health and behavioural problems

Emotion regulation problems at the core?

Parent as attachment figure?

Crying = unpleasant

Successful affect regulation by parents:
Parents are sensitive and responsive.

Children experience their parent as a secure base: Internal working model

Exploration and the development of autonomous affect regulation

Coping with stressful events autonomously

Stress-attachment model

Stress

Insecure attachment

Stress-attachment model

Emotional wellbeing
Parenting = less self-evident

Uncertainty about role of primary caregiver

Risk factors concerning secure attachment
  - Prolonged distress
  - Extraordinary sensitivity required
  - Unresolved reactions to diagnosis
  - …

2) Do children with significant developmental delay differentiate their attachment behaviour towards parents?

Discussion of the paper

2.1 Aims
1. … Examine the extent to which children display attachment behaviour towards parents

2. … Examine the extent to which they differentiate their behaviour according to the interaction partner

3. … Explore individual differences in attachment behaviour according to child- and parent characteristics

2.2 Method - Participants

- 14 care organisations participated
- 20 families

- Inclusion criteria
  - Between 1 and 7 years old
  - Severe or profound ID
  - Living at home

- No exclusion criteria
  - High non-response

- Sample
  - 2y1m – 6y11m
  - Developmental age:
    - \( X = 11.11 \text{ m} \ (6-16.50 \text{ m}) \)
    - Special daycare or special education schools
    - Belgian nationality (one adopted)
    - 35% mothers’ firstborn
2.2 Method - Procedure

- One home visit (1.5 hours)

- Protocol
  a. Explanation + informed consent
  b. Questionnaires
  c. Semi-structured interaction with separation from parent
     a. Interaction with parent
     b. Interaction with stranger

1. Proximity- and contact-seeking behaviour
2. Contact-maintaining behaviour
3. Resistant behaviour
4. Avoidant behaviour

Example 1

Example 2
2.3 Results – Attachment behaviour

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Secure attachment behaviour</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s self-report</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s self-report</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Towards father according to mother</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>6.30</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>1.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Towards mother according to father</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>5.60</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>1.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total composite across informants</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>6.30</td>
<td>5.60</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>1.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent composite with one informant</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>6.28</td>
<td>5.66</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>1.37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.3 Results – Child & parent characteristics

- Girls > Boys
- No epilepsy/autism > Epilepsy/autism
- Visual/motor impairment > No visual/motor impairment
  - Developmental age

- Additional disabilities less differentiation between parent/stranger
  - Developmental age ~ Proximity seeking

2.4 Take home points

1) Individual differences in attachment behaviour
   1) Self-report
   2) Observation

2) Differentiation according to interaction partner

3) Developmental age ~ less contact and proximity seeking
4) Comorbid disabilities ~ less differentiation
5) Limits to behavioural observation and existing coding scheme

"Physical contact with me helps to comfort my child"
"When my child is frightened or sad, (s)he is easily comforted by me"
"I am able to comfort my child by paying attention and talking to him/her"

"My child readily follows my suggestions"
"When my child finds something new to play, (s)he draws my attention"
"When other children bother my child, (s)he seeks contact"

"When my child is frightened or sad, (s)he is easily comforted by me"
"I am able to comfort my child by paying attention and talking to him/her"

"When other children bother my child, (s)he seeks contact"

"When my child finds something new to play, (s)he draws my attention"
What is my (unique?) role in the emotional life of my child?

Am I special for my child?

How can I notice, interpret and react adequately to the subtle emotional cues of my child?

*t klikt! A safe nest for my child with a significant developmental delay

Embedding in doctoral dissertation

Study 1: Observation study

Study 2: Intervention child
Study 3: Bioresponse intervention parents

Study 4: Bioresponse vs. other interventions

siem.vandesande@kuleuven.be
0032 16 37 69 44