

BONDING AND THE

"Day Care" is a subject which tends to polarise opinion; to the single parent or the economically struggling two parent family, the adult who genuinely wants to work or the student who is also a parent, the concept is most acceptable and very welcome. Day care fulfils a very real need for these people in our society which has managed to separate families into nuclear units and deprived them of the support of the extended family. Day care for these people enables them to pursue a livelihood or studies to lead to a livelihood and clearly in this context day care serves the parent or parents involved. There are other situations however, in which day care is perceived as being of consummate value to the child involved. There is a growing body of psychologists, neurologists and educators who believe that the first three years of life constitute the most crucial stage of development, in that all later learning depends upon the cognitive and social gains made by the infant. It therefore follows that exponents of this philosophy would have us believe that the infant/toddler must be in the most advantageous environment at his disposal, and that for some infants and toddlers an impoverished, unstimulating home is not the most ideal environment. Rather day care should be provided for such disadvantaged children so that they might develop to their fullest potential during the first few years of life. Assuredly day care in this context is for the child rather than the family, although the majority of such enrichment programmes embody a parenting programme.

A third group of people advocate day care as being of benefit to both parents and children. These are the devotees of the "children are not always fun" theory who decry the ambiguous picture of the perfect mum and the equally appealing children depicted in women's magazines and in media advertising. They suggest that parents and potential parents are provided with an unreal depiction of the joys of parenthood, and, as a consequence, guilt becomes an established part of a parent's repertoire when he or she discovers that children can be less than perfect. These devotees suggest that both parents and children need "time out" away from each other, and that day care facilities should be provided as part of any community health project.

There are then, three different reasons for utilising existing day care facil-

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ities and even for establishing more centres for the purposes outlined previously.

However, if we are to take a straw vote of people in our neighbourhood concerning the role of day care we would probably find a large group of people who perceived day care in any form as "bad" in that it separated the young child and his parent — usually the mother — and that this in some vague way is bad. Probably if you were to suggest that they were referring to the weakening of the mother-infant bond and the loss of attachment, they would probably agree but would not be able to enunciate their fears beyond this point. Bonding per se, like day care, has received a great deal of attention in the popular press, and in fact Dr. Hugh Jolly has seen fit to describe bonding as the process whereby the parent and infant "fall in love" with each other. This seems to be a fair enough comment as the new born infant is far from being passive and can be seen to play a very active part in the establishment of the affectional bond which unites the mother and the child, by responding to the mother's voice, moods and basic rhythms of movement even before birth. Studies indicate that within a few days or weeks the neonate can discriminate between his own mother and someone else, just as mothers can distinguish their own baby's cry from that of other babies within a few days of birth. We know also that the child's crying patterns, his ability to smile without copying an adult, and eye tracking activities are three crucial bonding behaviours, which together with suckling enable the neonate to participate in establishing the affectional bond so necessary for his nurturance and overall well being.

Success in bonding will depend upon a number of factors such as the parents' own experiences as a baby and young child, whether or not the baby was desired, the parent's knowledge of parenting as gleaned from observation

books, and the media, and so on, but it is fairly safe to assume that, all things being equal, an affectional bond will be formed between the infant and a mother figure, even if that person is rejecting, provided there is sufficient interaction. Once the infant has formed an attachment, usually by about the age of seven months, the baby will maintain a degree of proximity to the attachment figure and will reliably protest separation from her, even if his basic physiological needs are gratified by other caregivers.

Ainsworth has described attachment thus:

"an affectional tie that one person forms to another specific person, binding them together in space and enduring over time."

Ainsworth was not the first to use the term; it was first used by Bowlby in 1958. Bowlby has endeavoured to explain attachment behaviour in terms of an ethological-evolutionary theory. According to Bowlby the behavioural systems which mediate infant-mother attachment have evolved through a process of natural selection because they gave survival advantages to infants and young children in the environment in which the human species emerged. While the contemporary environment contains relatively few of the selective pressures that led to that evolution, the genetic determinants of infant and toddler behaviour have remained essentially unchanged; the child's behaviour is changeable, but there are limits to the environmental variations he is able to tolerate and still develop normally. If the environment deviates too widely from that to which he is adapted as a result of evolution, then behavioural anomalies will result.

Obviously this attachment theory raises the question of how much flexibility we have in our modern society in terms of arranging child care facilities without working against the basic propensities for the formation and maintenance of attachment relationships. Child Care, of necessity, involves concepts of multiple mothering, and/or mother/child separation, which proponents of Bowlby's stance would argue may interfere with the development of normal attachments to the mother, or disrupt already established relationships. Bowlby himself in *Child Care and the Growth of Love* has stated quite categorically that several diverse deprivation conditions may lead to negative effects

PROVISION OF SUITABLE DAY CARE FACILITIES



that appear to be similar in nature and severity. These are as follows:

- (a) when an infant or toddler is separated from his mother and cared for in an institution in which he receives insufficient maternal care either through neglect or through being the recipient of care from a multiplicity of caretakers;
- (b) when an infant or toddler in his own home is the recipient of grossly insufficient maternal care; in other words, deprivation can begin in the home;
- (c) when the young child undergoes a series of separations from his mother to whom he has formed an attachment, as can occur when one of the parties leaves home or is hospitalised repeatedly.

To compound the serious nature of the problem Ainsworth and other researchers have used the balance between exploratory and attachment behaviours as an index of secure attachment. The view taken is that the baby uses the mother as a secure base from which to explore the world. In other words, this means that a baby who explores widely with only occasional returns to look at, or touch or cuddle the mother is perceived as emotionally attached, and therefore relatively secure, whereas a baby who cries and clings constantly to his mother is perceived to be insecurely

attached. Sroufe (1979) has suggested that these differences in attachment are evidence of emerging patterns of personality organisation, rather than evidence of temperament. He argues that securely attached children may be hypoactive or hyperactive, cuddly or non-cuddly, or as he describes it 'slow to warm up or not'.. (Sroufe, 1979, p. 838). What securely attached children have in common is the capacity to firstly use the caregiver as a secure base for exploration, and secondly to actively initiate contact upon reunion. In addition, they demonstrate the same behaviours as do the anxiously attached children, but in different contexts. They may fuss and squirm and otherwise resist contact with a stranger or pay little or no attention to the mother at times prior to separation – but not on reunion. As toddlers, securely attached infants were found by Sroufe to be more enthusiastic more persistent and exhibited more positive affect; they complied with maternal suggestions more and ignored less than did nonattached group in the study data which helped affirm Sroufe's contention that attachment patterns and personality organisation were related.

In spite of the very real attempts by Sroufe and others to investigate Bowlby's original premise relating to separation and attachment, several basic problems still remain. The first is that the separation sequences set up in the

laboratory or in the home have lasted only a few minutes, rather than constituting major separations of days, or even months. Thus for an infant to protest about the mother's departure for a few minutes will depend, in some cases, on whether the departure was voluntary. There is evidence to suggest that protest is unlikely if the infant or toddler willingly leaves the mother in order to explore elsewhere, or if the infant is left with another attachment figure, rather than alone or with a stranger. In addition, being left alone in a strange environment is more threatening than comparable separations in one's own home.

The second problem encountered in investigating Bowlby's original premise is that many experimenters interpreted his attachment theory as claiming that an infant can become attached to only one person – his mother; however this is not the case, but one must take into account the fact that infants are highly selective in their choice of attachment figure from amongst the adults known to them. In addition, not all social relationships may develop into attachments nor will all attachments be equally important to the child; in fact it seems probable that the child may have a primary attachment figure and several subordinate figures in a kind of hierarchy.

A great amount of research has

looked at very young children in the day care situation, including Doyle (1975), Gifford et al in Canberra (1975), Brookhart and Hock (1976), Young and Smith (1977), Cochran (1977), Kagan et al (1977), Winnett et al (1977), Moskowitz et al (1977), Fowler and Khan (1978), Golden et al (1978) and Portnoy and Simmons (1978), to name a few. It is interesting that they found no real difference between the affective development of children in day-care and those at home. The Blehar (1974) study on the other hand found differences, but it has been criticised as the recorders were aware of the children's background. While the majority of the studies do not support the concept of day care as being counterproductive to the young child's attachment, most studies have focussed on the relations of day-care children with their mothers. Young and Smith (1977) observed the relationship between dependency on the caregiver (measured by such variables as physical closeness or contact to the caregiver and verbal contact); it was found that children who entered the child care centre younger were more dependent on the day care teacher. However, it is difficult to determine whether this increased dependency could be considered maladaptive since much of the greater interaction was of a verbal nature and could have indicated a greater enjoyment of aptive since much of the greater interaction was of a verbal nature and could have indicated a greater enjoyment of adult company.

The role of fathers in attachment needs further exploration as well. Both Bowlby and Ainsworth have been quite explicit in suggesting that babies become attached to fathers as well as other caregivers. Kotelchuck (1973) found in "strange situation" studies (as devised by Ainsworth) that fathers provided security for their babies, and that the father's departure was responded to in the same way as departures by the mother. Lamb (1977) has suggested that the bonds formed between infant and mother and infant and father are different, in that mothers normally hold babies in order to perform caretaking functions, whereas fathers normally hold babies in order to play; therefore babies respond more positively to physical contact with fathers but turn to mothers for security. Considering that there is a growing body of evidence to suggest that the birth of the child has a profound impact on the father concerned (Greenberg and Morris, 1974) it may be appropriate to suggest that fathers consider themselves as the most important secondary attachment figure for the baby, if you agree with the hierarchy theory put forward by Bowlby.

All in all, it would seem that the problems of attachment and separation will never be adequately settled to everyone's satisfaction. So much depends upon the circumstances of the separation, the adequacy of the substitute environment, the child's stage of development and previous experience, as well as the nature of the child's relationship with attachment figures. To relate all these "ifs" and "buts" to real terms, perhaps substitute day-care may/ should operate in this way:

- (1) care at home with father,
- (2) care at home with another attachment figure,
- (3) care at a parent co-operative, where the primary attachment figure will be present at some time,
- (4) care in family day care with a small number of children,
- (5) care in a centre attached to the primary caregiver's place of employment,
- (6) care in a centre isolated from all primary and secondary caregivers.

If this scenario is anywhere near the mark, then our existing society is a long way from that same mark. However, the majority of evidence suggests number six is okay, but only time will tell.

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