



# Attachment: AQA A-Level Psychology

This presentation explores the key concepts, studies and theories of attachment as specified in the AQA A-Level Psychology curriculum (section 4.1.3). Each slide includes relevant exam-style questions with mark allocations to support your revision.



**by Stephen Renwick**

# Caregiver-Infant Interactions

Reciprocity and interactional synchrony are fundamental aspects of early caregiver-infant interactions. Reciprocity refers to the two-way, back-and-forth exchanges where both parties respond to each other's signals. For example, when a baby smiles, the caregiver smiles back, reinforcing the behaviour.

Interactional synchrony describes the precise timing and coordination of these exchanges, where caregiver and infant mirror each other's expressions, movements and vocalisations, creating a 'dance-like' pattern of interaction that strengthens their bond.

These early interactions form the foundation for attachment development and help infants learn about social communication and emotional regulation.



## Exam Questions:

1. Explain what is meant by 'reciprocity' in caregiver-infant interactions. (2 marks)
2. Outline interactional synchrony and its importance in attachment formation. (4 marks)
3. Discuss how early caregiver-infant interactions contribute to social development. (8 marks)

# Schaffer's Stages of Attachment

## Stage 1: Pre-attachment (0-6 weeks)

Babies show indiscriminate responsiveness to all human contact. They display innate behaviours like crying, smiling and grasping that bring adults close, but don't show preference for their primary caregiver.

## Stage 3: Clear-cut attachment (6/8 months-18 months)

Infants show specific attachment to primary caregiver(s). Separation anxiety emerges, and babies use the caregiver as a secure base for exploration.

## Stage 2: Attachment-in-making (6 weeks-6/8 months)

Infants begin to recognise familiar people and respond more positively to them. They develop preference for familiar caregivers but don't yet show separation anxiety.

## Stage 4: Multiple attachments (18 months onwards)

Children develop attachments to multiple figures and begin to understand others' goals and feelings, allowing for more complex relationships.

## Exam Questions:

1. Outline Schaffer's four stages of attachment development. (4 marks)
2. Explain why separation anxiety is an important indicator of attachment. (3 marks)
3. Evaluate Schaffer's stage theory of attachment development. (8 marks)

# Multiple Attachments and the Father's Role

While early attachment theories emphasised the mother-infant bond, research now recognises that infants form multiple attachments to various caregivers. These attachments may serve different functions:

- Primary attachment figure (often the mother) typically provides comfort and security
- Secondary attachment figures (father, grandparents, siblings) may be preferred for play and exploration

The father's role is increasingly recognised as significant and distinct from the mother's. Fathers often engage in more physical, stimulating play that helps children develop risk-taking abilities and independence. Research by Grossmann et al. (2002) found that father-child play sensitivity at age 2 predicted better social and emotional outcomes at age 16.



## Exam Questions:

1. Explain what is meant by 'multiple attachments' in infant development. (2 marks)
2. Outline two ways in which the father's role in attachment might differ from the mother's role. (4 marks)
3. 'The mother-infant bond is the only attachment relationship that matters for healthy development.' Discuss this statement. (16 marks)

# Animal Studies: Lorenz and Harlow

## 1 Konrad Lorenz (1935) - Imprinting in Geese

Lorenz split greylag goose eggs into two groups: one hatched with their mother, the other with Lorenz himself. The goslings that hatched with Lorenz followed him rather than the goose mother, demonstrating imprinting - a rapid, innate learning process occurring during a critical period. This suggested attachment has a biological basis rather than being solely learned through feeding.

## 2 Harry Harlow (1958) - Rhesus Monkeys

Harlow separated infant rhesus monkeys from their mothers and gave them two surrogate 'mothers': a wire mother with a feeding bottle and a cloth mother without food. The infants spent most time with the cloth mother and would cling to it when frightened, only visiting the wire mother to feed. This contradicted learning theory's prediction that infants attach to whoever feeds them, suggesting comfort (contact comfort) is more important than food for attachment formation.

### Exam Questions:

1. Describe Lorenz's research on imprinting in geese. (4 marks)
2. Explain how Harlow's research challenges learning theory explanations of attachment. (4 marks)
3. Evaluate the ethical issues raised by animal studies of attachment. (8 marks)

# Learning Theory Explanation of Attachment

Learning theory proposes that attachment develops through classical and operant conditioning processes:

## Classical Conditioning

The infant associates the caregiver (neutral stimulus) with food (unconditioned stimulus) which naturally produces pleasure (unconditioned response). Eventually, the caregiver alone produces pleasure (conditioned response).

## Operant Conditioning

Caregiving behaviours (feeding, holding) reduce discomfort (negative reinforcement) or provide pleasure (positive reinforcement), increasing attachment behaviours. This creates a secondary drive - the infant learns to value the caregiver beyond just providing food.

Dollard and Miller (1950) proposed that attachment is a learned drive, developing because the mother satisfies the infant's primary drives like hunger.



## Exam Questions:

1. Explain how classical conditioning contributes to attachment formation according to learning theory. (3 marks)
2. Outline what is meant by 'secondary drive' in learning theory explanations of attachment. (2 marks)
3. Evaluate learning theory as an explanation of attachment. (8 marks)
4. Compare learning theory and evolutionary explanations of attachment. (12 marks)



# Bowlby's Monotropic Theory of Attachment

## 1 Evolutionary Basis

Bowlby proposed that attachment has an evolutionary advantage - it increases survival chances by keeping infants close to caregivers for protection. Attachment behaviours (crying, smiling, following) are innate and have evolved through natural selection because they promote proximity to caregivers.

## 2 Monotropy

Infants are predisposed to form one primary attachment (usually with the mother) that is qualitatively different from other attachments. This primary attachment serves as a template for future relationships.

## 3 Social Releasers

Babies possess innate behaviours (social releasers) like smiling and crying that elicit caregiving responses from adults, facilitating attachment formation.

### Exam Questions:

1. Explain what Bowlby meant by 'monotropy'. (2 marks)
2. Outline the evolutionary basis of attachment according to Bowlby. (4 marks)
3. Evaluate Bowlby's monotropic theory of attachment. (8 marks)
4. To what extent is Bowlby's theory supported by research evidence? (16 marks)

# Critical Period and Internal Working Model

## Critical Period

Bowlby proposed a critical period (later revised to a sensitive period) for attachment formation between 3 and 6 months, extending to about 3 years. During this time, infants are biologically predisposed to form attachments. If attachment doesn't occur during this period, Bowlby suggested it would be difficult or impossible to form later, potentially resulting in long-term developmental consequences.

## Internal Working Model

Through interactions with caregivers, infants develop mental representations or 'internal working models' of relationships. These models include expectations about:

- The reliability and responsiveness of others
- The self as worthy (or unworthy) of care and attention
- How relationships generally function

These models guide behaviour in future relationships and can persist throughout life.



## Exam Questions:

1. Explain what is meant by a 'critical period' in attachment formation. (3 marks)
2. Outline Bowlby's concept of an internal working model. (4 marks)
3. Discuss the evidence for a critical period in attachment development. (8 marks)
4. Assess the importance of the internal working model for understanding the long-term effects of early attachment experiences. (12 marks)



# Ainsworth's Strange Situation

## Methodology

The Strange Situation is a controlled observation procedure developed by Mary Ainsworth to assess attachment quality in 12-18 month-old infants. It involves eight 3-minute episodes where the infant experiences increasing stress as the mother leaves and returns twice, and a stranger enters the room.

## Behavioural Measures

Researchers observe and code the infant's behaviours, focusing particularly on:

- Separation anxiety when the mother leaves
- Stranger anxiety in the mother's absence
- Reunion behaviour when the mother returns
- Exploratory behaviour and use of the mother as a secure base

## Classification

Based on these observations, Ainsworth identified three attachment types: secure (Type B), insecure-avoidant (Type A), and insecure-resistant/ambivalent (Type C). Later, Main and Solomon added a fourth type: disorganised/disoriented (Type D).

## Exam Questions:

1. Describe the procedure of the Strange Situation. (4 marks)
2. Explain how separation and reunion behaviours are used to classify attachment types. (4 marks)
3. Evaluate the Strange Situation as a method of assessing attachment. (8 marks)

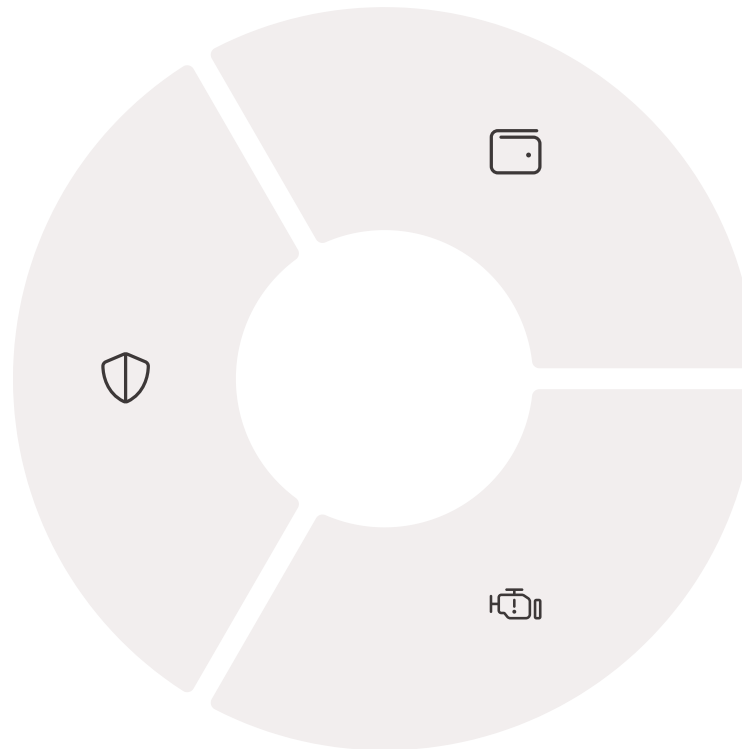
# Types of Attachment

## Secure Attachment (Type B)

~65% of infants in Western samples

- Uses mother as secure base for exploration
- Shows distress when mother leaves
- Easily comforted upon reunion
- Prefers mother over stranger

Associated with sensitive, responsive caregiving



## Insecure-Avoidant (Type A)

~20% of infants in Western samples

- Shows little distress when mother leaves
- Avoids or ignores mother upon reunion
- Treats stranger similarly to mother

Associated with rejecting, unresponsive caregiving

## Insecure-Resistant (Type C)

~15% of infants in Western samples

- Clingy, poor exploration
- Extremely distressed by separation
- Difficult to comfort upon reunion
- May show anger toward mother

Associated with inconsistent caregiving

## Exam Questions:

1. Describe the behavioural characteristics of secure attachment. (4 marks)
2. Compare and contrast insecure-avoidant and insecure-resistant attachment patterns. (6 marks)
3. Discuss how different patterns of caregiving might lead to different attachment types. (8 marks)

# Cultural Variations in Attachment

Attachment patterns vary across cultures, raising questions about the universality of attachment theory. Van Ijzendoorn and Kroonenberg (1988) conducted a meta-analysis of Strange Situation studies across 32 studies in 8 countries:

- Secure attachment was the most common type in all cultures studied (ranging from 50-75%)
- German infants showed higher rates of avoidant attachment (35% vs. global average of 20%)
- Japanese and Israeli kibbutz infants showed higher rates of resistant attachment (27% vs. global average of 15%)

These variations likely reflect different childrearing practices and cultural values:

- German emphasis on independence may encourage avoidant patterns
- Japanese emphasis on mother-child closeness may make separation more stressful
- Communal childrearing in kibbutzim may affect attachment formation



## Exam Questions:

1. Outline the findings of van Ijzendoorn's cross-cultural research on attachment. (4 marks)
2. Explain how cultural differences in childrearing practices might influence attachment patterns. (4 marks)
3. 'Attachment theory is culturally biased and not universally applicable.' Discuss this statement. (16 marks)

# Bowlby's Maternal Deprivation Hypothesis

## 1 Key Claims

In his 1951 report to the World Health Organisation, Bowlby proposed the maternal deprivation hypothesis, claiming that disruption of the mother-child bond during the critical period (first 2-3 years) would have severe and irreversible negative consequences, including:

- Intellectual impairment
- Inability to form meaningful relationships
- Delinquency and affectionless psychopathy
- Depression and reduced emotional wellbeing

## 2 Supporting Evidence

Bowlby's own research with juvenile delinquents (44 Thieves Study, 1944) found that many had experienced early separation from their mothers. He also cited evidence from children in hospitals and institutions who showed signs of distress and developmental delays.

## 3 Later Refinements

Bowlby later distinguished between different types of deprivation experiences:

- Privation: never forming an attachment
- Deprivation: loss of an attachment figure after attachment has formed

He also acknowledged that the effects could be reversed with appropriate intervention.

## Exam Questions:

1. Outline Bowlby's maternal deprivation hypothesis. (4 marks)
2. Explain the difference between privation and deprivation. (4 marks)
3. Evaluate the evidence for Bowlby's maternal deprivation hypothesis. (8 marks)

# Romanian Orphan Studies

Following the fall of Ceaușescu's regime in 1989, over 100,000 children were discovered in Romanian orphanages (institutions) living in severely deprived conditions:

- Minimal physical care and almost no social interaction
- High child-to-caregiver ratios (often 15:1 or higher)
- Children spent up to 20 hours a day in their cots

The English and Romanian Adoptees (ERA) study by Rutter and colleagues followed 165 Romanian orphans adopted into UK families:

- Children adopted before 6 months showed near-complete recovery
- Children adopted after 6 months often showed lasting effects, including cognitive delays, attachment problems, and quasi-autism
- Some children showed remarkable resilience despite early deprivation

These studies provide evidence for the effects of institutional care and the importance of early intervention, while suggesting that Bowlby's original hypothesis was too deterministic.



## Exam Questions:

1. Describe the conditions experienced by children in Romanian orphanages. (4 marks)
2. Outline the key findings of the English and Romanian Adoptees (ERA) study. (6 marks)
3. 'The Romanian orphan studies show that early deprivation always leads to irreversible damage.' Discuss this statement. (16 marks)

# Influence on Childhood Relationships



## Early Attachment Quality

The quality of early attachment relationships creates an internal working model that shapes expectations about relationships.



## Peer Relationships

Securely attached children typically show greater social competence, more positive peer interactions, and better conflict resolution skills. Research by Sroufe et al. (2005) found that securely attached infants were rated as more popular and less aggressive by teachers at age 10.



## Teacher Relationships

Early attachment patterns influence how children relate to teachers and other authority figures. Secure children typically form better relationships with teachers and adapt better to school environments, while insecure children may struggle with classroom behaviour and academic engagement.

## Exam Questions:

1. Explain how early attachment experiences might influence a child's peer relationships. (4 marks)
2. Outline research evidence linking attachment quality to social development in childhood. (6 marks)
3. Evaluate the view that early attachment is the most important factor in determining a child's social development. (16 marks)



# Influence on Adult Relationships

The internal working model formed in infancy continues to influence relationship patterns throughout life, affecting romantic relationships, parenting, and general social functioning:

## Romantic Relationships

Hazan and Shaver (1987) found that adult romantic attachment styles parallel infant attachment patterns:

- Secure adults (56%) find it easy to get close to others and are comfortable with dependency
- Avoidant adults (25%) are uncomfortable with closeness and find it difficult to trust others
- Anxious/ambivalent adults (19%) desire extreme closeness and fear abandonment

## Intergenerational Transmission

The Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) developed by Main et al. shows that parents' attachment representations predict their children's attachment styles with about 75% accuracy, suggesting attachment patterns can be transmitted across generations.



## Exam Questions:

1. Describe Hazan and Shaver's research on adult attachment styles. (4 marks)
2. Explain how the internal working model might influence adult romantic relationships. (4 marks)
3. 'Early attachment experiences determine our adult relationships.' Discuss this statement with reference to research evidence. (16 marks)
4. Evaluate the concept of intergenerational transmission of attachment. (8 marks)