

## Book Excerpt

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**Topic:** Becoming a Secure Attachment Figure for Your Partner

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**Title:** Attachment Theory and Affect Regulation: The Dynamics, Development, and Cognitive Consequences of Attachment-Related Strategies

**Referenced Page(s):** 78-9

In his (*John Bowlby*) view, proximity seeking is an inborn affect-regulation device (primary attachment strategy) designed to protect an individual from physical and psychological threats and to alleviate distress. Bowlby (1988) claimed that the successful accomplishment of these affect-regulation functions results in a sense of attachment security—a sense that the world is a safe place, that one can rely on protective others, and that one can therefore confidently explore the environment and engage effectively with other people. (p. 78)

Bowlby (1982/1969) also delineated the provisions a relationship partner should supply, or the functions this person should serve, if he or she is to become an attachment figure (see also Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Hazan & Zeifman, 1994). First, attachment figures are targets of proximity maintenance. Humans of all ages tend to seek and enjoy proximity to their attachment figures in times of need and to experience distress upon separation from these figures. Second, attachment figures provide a physical and emotional safe haven; they facilitate distress alleviation and are a source of support and comfort. Third, attachment figures provide a secure base from which people can explore and learn about the world and develop their own capacities and personality. By accomplishing these functions, a relationship partner becomes a source of attachment security. (pp. 78-9)

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### Notes on the Quote:

If you want your partner to feel more secure in the relationship; this excerpt provides three actions you can take that should result in you becoming a source of security for your partner.

1. **Proximity Maintenance** This “jargony” term means to be available for your partner, particularly when he/she is under any form of stress. Think of it as “maintaining closeness” or being “readily available.” Be physically and emotionally present. Communicate through your availability that you will always be there for your partner.

2. **Safe Haven** The Cambridge dictionary definition of “safe haven” is “a place where someone is safe from danger.” Not just physical danger; but emotional danger as well. Think of it as a “criticism-free zone” where your partner can feel accepted, valued and protected.
3. **Secure Base** This term means a place from which a person can venture out into the world with confidence that a safe place exists; one to which they can return if people or events become threatening. Being a secure base involves encouraging your partner to try new things, to stretch themselves as they explore the world outside your relationship—knowing they have a safe haven they can return to if they need comfort, reassurance or protection.

You may not need to practice these things constantly, but you will want to make sure your partner has no doubt that in times of stress; you will readily respond with all three elements (i.e., you are there for your partner both physically and emotionally, you will be accepting and comforting, and you will support his/her efforts to enter into whatever the world has to offer.)