

# The Importance of Attachment Roots in Education



## TASK:

- 🔄 what are your long-term goals for your children?
  - ➔ which adjectives/phrases come into your mind?
  - ➔ which qualities do you want to see in your child? (nice,...)
- 🔄 results are the same no matter where you ask the question: parents wish their children to be happy, balanced, empathic, independent, productive, self-confident, mentally healthy, active, caring, responsible, altruistic, pleasant, curious, considerate, confident, etc.
- 🔄 Christian context: merciful, loving God, following Christ etc.



🔄 how are you treating your children on a daily basis?

↳ does your parenting style help your children to grow into a person as described above – or is it rather the opposite?

🔄 imagine: hallway of your child's school → two other parents are talking about your child

↳ which sentence would you like to hear?

↳ would it be: “Wow, this child does everything you tell him/her to do and NEVER objects!” ?

↳ do we sometimes act as if this is what counts most to us?

🔄 list of adjectives above: characteristics of a mature person

↳ the methods we use are not only ineffective, but harmful

↳ we use these methods because we are immature ourselves



## Topics of presentation:

- 🔄 How can children become mature adults?
- 🔄 Why nobody is a fully mature person
- 🔄 Jesus is dealing with us the same way we should deal with our children



Key word: **attachment**

- 🔄 striving for attachment → innate
- 🔄 Adam in paradise → longed for „his own kind“
- 🔄 attachment → "engine" for relationship
- 🔄 first 6-7 years of life → 6 stages of attachment  
→ mature and healthy person
- 🔄 developed by Dr. Gordon Neufeld



## 1<sup>st</sup> stage: proximity (first year of life)

- 🔄 babies are fully dependent on their parents
  - absorb them with all their senses and thus bond with them (cuddling, kissing, being carried, being sung to etc.)
- 🔄 ONLY way children under one are bonding
- 🔄 around 1<sup>st</sup> birthday
  - next stage of attachment, BUT: closeness (proximity) remains essential throughout our lives!



## problematic educational practices (1<sup>st</sup> stage)

### 🔄 “sleep training” for babies

- children experience panic that can be so extreme as to lead to fear of death
- method “works” because body shuts down to secure survival

### 🔄 punishments that have to do with **separation** (time-out, taking away toys)

- state of alarm and fear (brain cannot “learn”)
- important form of attachment is interrupted



## 2<sup>nd</sup> stage: sameness (second year of life)

- 🔄 imitation and emulation of most important caregivers  
→ essential for the transmission of language and culture
- 🔄 mirror neurons: similar patterns of activity when watching and performing a process
- 🔄 children imitate words, actions, gestures, facial expressions
- 🔄 this form of attachment can be found everywhere  
→ prominent during school age (idols; cliques)



### 3<sup>rd</sup> stage: **belonging or loyalty** (third year of life)

- 🔄 “terrible twos” start: child strives for more autonomy and self-determination
  - ➔ own personality starts to unfold
    - ➔ dilemma: child does not always want to do the same as parents ➔ wants to live out his/her individuality, but maintain attachment to parents
- 🔄 toddler claims ownership of everything to which s/he feels a bond (parents, siblings, toys)
  - ➔ ”mine!”: frequent word at that age
- 🔄 loyal to friends, parents, objects
  - ➔ feeling of belonging
  - ➔ can cry over an empty box of cornflakes in the trash



## problematic educational practices (3<sup>rd</sup> stage)

🔄 parents try to get the toddler to share with others

→ want to teach altruistic behavior

🔄 **problem:** empathy does not *start* to develop until about 3.5 years of age

→ child *begins* to be able to put her-/himself in the place of others, understands that another child may be sad if s/he is rejected or that s/he will get the toy back

🔄 sharing generously with others is impossible until a certain age

! important: certain things should belong to the child exclusively (s/he can dispose of them and is allowed to deny them to others)

→ helps striving for autonomy and self-determination



## 4<sup>th</sup> stage: **significance** (fourth year of life)

🔄 feeling of being important to someone

↳ ensures closeness and connection

↳ children want to experience being meaningful

↳ want to please and seek approval: help with chores,  
“Mommy! Look what I can do!”

🔄 at this point: children become vulnerable

↳ extremely susceptible to rejection, disapproving looks, etc.

↳ suffer as result



## 5<sup>th</sup> stage: love (fifth year of life)

🔄 feelings of affection, warmth and love play a role in all attachment stages

→ however: now, child intensely strives for emotional closeness

→ if experienced, physical separation from parents can be better tolerated

→ children can still maintain attachment (hold on to feeling of being loved)

🔄 children often declare their love and MEAN it



## 6<sup>th</sup> stage: being known (sixth year of life)

- 🔄 child feels seen and heard, sharing all his secrets
  - ➔ secrets that are not shared would be experienced as a loss of closeness
- 🔄 deepest and rarest form of intimacy
  - ➔ reason why so many of us are hesitant to talk about our deepest insecurities and concerns
- 🔄 no greater closeness than the feeling of being liked, accepted and embraced by another person as you are



How can we complete all six stages?

1<sup>st</sup> stage: proximity

2<sup>nd</sup> stage: sameness

3<sup>rd</sup> stage: belonging or loyalty

🔄 children "slip" into first three attachment levels more or less automatically → "visible" stages

4<sup>th</sup> stage: significance

5<sup>th</sup> stage: love

6<sup>th</sup> stage: being known

🔄 stages four to six: new attachment stage can only be reached if previous one has been successfully saturated  
→ increasing degree of vulnerability must be allowed/shown



## How to spot non-completion

### examples:

- 🔄 adults who constantly want to prove to themselves and others that they are important and significant → constant stories of their accomplished deeds
  - 🔄 extremely "cool" and emotionally distant people → do not show emotions or other "weaknesses"
  - 🔄 church members who only attach by levels 1-3
    - one member holds positions that do not "fit" (new theological ideas, different view on how to deal with the pandemic etc.)
    - often: expulsion or two groups emerge → division
- ! strong indication that not all attachment stages have been completed and thus a mature personality has not been developed



## Why do people not complete all six stages?

- 🔄 parents (or closest caregivers) are immature personalities themselves
  - ➔ cannot provide children with love, appreciation, loyalty, and warmth they need to move from one stage to the next
- 🔄 saying sentences like:
  - “there is no reason to cry right now”,
  - “stop crying, this is your own fault that the toy is broken now”,
  - “if you do not stop your tantrum right now, there will be no dessert later!”,
  - “go to your room and come back after you have calmed down”,
  - “Jesus doesn’t like children that are crying/angry!”
  - ➔ children learn to suppress emotions in order to avoid punishment or being liked
    - ➔ have to “armor” (=harden) their hearts and learn not to be vulnerable



Ellen G. White

“Parents should encourage their children to confide in *them* and unburden to them their heart griefs, their little daily annoyances and trials. Kindly instruct them and bind them to your hearts. It is a critical time for children. Influences will be thrown around them to wean them from you which you must counteract. Teach them to make you their confidant. Let them whisper in your ear their trials and joys.”

(The Adventist Home, 190f.)



## Maya's story

- 🕒 grew up in a Christian family
- 🕒 strict rules and high expectations
- 🕒 physical and other forms of punishment
- 🕒 learned to swallow her frustration
- 🕒 was taught proper behavior and obedience towards her parents
- 🕒 had only Christian friends and stayed away from worldly influences
- 🕒 became an exemplary Christian → served faithfully in the church and tried to obey God with all her heart



## Maya's story

- 🔄 had the same high goals for her daughter's education
- 🔄 parenting became a struggle
- 🔄 the more disobedient her daughter was, the stricter Maya became the stricter she was, the more her daughter rebelled
- 🔄 Maya was angry and desperate
- 🔄 their relationship fell apart when daughter became a teenager: first boyfriend at 14, daughter moved out and lived with her boyfriend
- 🔄 when visiting, Maya wanted to take advantage of these opportunities and corrected her wherever she could
- 🔄 Maya asked in church to pray for and told herself: "I have done everything in my power. Youth these days are just like that."



## Analyzing Maya

- 🔄 learned from an early age not to disagree, to behave well, how to earn love and be accepted
- 🔄 no appreciation, no unconditional love and acceptance from parents → love was always tied to conditions
- 🔄 her feelings were never approved, she never experienced mercy, but was consistently punished for her misbehavior
- 🔄 brain was programmed to obey in order to be loved
- 🔄 she learned to work for love and attachment
- 🔄 she has never developed deeper attachment roots → would have had to show herself vulnerable → she hardened her heart



## Analyzing Maya

- 🔄 has never matured in love → façade of a mature Christian  
→ inside: no mercy
- 🔄 tried to raise daughter like a soldier → wanted to do everything right  
→ character was anything but loving
- 🔄 heart was completely armored against any vulnerable feeling  
→ could not sympathize with others
- 🔄 did not see her daughter's helplessness, did not see her longing to be loved for who she is
- 🔄 did not feel empathy, but always saw only own expectations and rules
- 🔄 could not give daughter unconditional love → never experienced it herself  
→ no deeper attachment roots
- 🔄 only connected on 2<sup>nd</sup> stage (sameness)



Love vs. Fear  
(basic human emotions)

LOVE

- 🔄 Joy
- 🔄 Peace
- 🔄 Kindness
- 🔄 Ease
- 🔄 Patience
- 🔄 Contentment
- 🔄 Trust
- ...

FEAR

- 🔄 Shame
- 🔄 Worry
- 🔄 Rejection
- 🔄 Panic
- 🔄 Hatred
- 🔄 Jealousy
- ...



## Analysing Maya

- 🔄 if Maya could come to know the true God of love, her heart would change
- 🔄 she would no longer have to struggle to do everything right
  - ➡ the pressure and fear inside her would cease
  - ➡ she would be at peace
- 🔄 she would finally feel what kind of compulsion she was putting on her daughter
- 🔄 she could accept her daughter in all her being, give her compassion, care and dignity
  - ➡ protective wall between them would be able to fall
- 🔄 her daughter would finally get what her heart longs for
  - ➡ she would be able to trust her mother and eventually open her heart
  - ➡ would bring about true change
- 🔄 only freedom can awaken the desire to want to change and to accept the God of unconditional love



## What are our motives in parenting?

🔄 are we parenting out of **fear** or out of **love**?

🔄 the **love** for our children is interspersed with smaller or larger portions of immaturity and thus with smaller or larger portions of **fear**:

- ✘ "If the child doesn't obey me now, she'll always disobey!"
- ✘ "If the 4-year-old doesn't learn to share now, he'll never learn it and become a big egotist!"
- ✘ "What will the other church members think of us as parents when my 3-year-old throws a tantrum in the foyer?"

! fear speaks here and it causes us to humiliate, punish, threaten, coerce or bribe → Jesus used **none** of these means to bring people under His influence



What are our motives in parenting?

🔄 Jesus' means of choice is **love**, and this love fundamentally transforms people.

"Fear is not in love, but perfect love casts out fear, for fear has to do with punishment; whoever then fears has not become perfect in love. "

1 John 4:18



"Only by love is love awakened."

Ellen G. White  
(Desire of Ages, 22)



## Literature

MacNamara, Deborah. *Rest, Play, Grow*

Neufeld, Gordon. *Hold on to your kids! Why parents need to matter more than peers*

Kohn, Alfie. *Unconditional parenting: moving from rewards and punishments to love and reason*

<https://neufeldinstitute.org/>



## Podcast

### English: (“**theBond**”)

[www.anchor.fm/thebondpodcast](http://www.anchor.fm/thebondpodcast) or  
[www.tinyurl.com/thebondpodcast](http://www.tinyurl.com/thebondpodcast) (Spotify)  
YouTube: search for “theBond Podcast”  
Instagram: @thebondpodcast



### French: (“**leLien**”)

[www.anchor.fm/lelien](http://www.anchor.fm/lelien) or  
[www.tinyurl.com/lelienpodcast](http://www.tinyurl.com/lelienpodcast) (Spotify)  
YouTube: search for “leLien Podcast”



### Spanish: (“**enVínculo**”)

[www.anchor.fm/envinculo](http://www.anchor.fm/envinculo) or  
[www.tinyurl.com/envinculopodcast](http://www.tinyurl.com/envinculopodcast) (Spotify)  
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### German (“**inBindung**”)

[www.anchor.fm/inbindung](http://www.anchor.fm/inbindung) or  
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Thank you!

