

How does attachment influence parenting?

Parenting is a difficult job. Our main blueprint is our own experience of being parented. When we share parenting with our partners, two blueprints come together. This can be a point in the family life cycle which causes fractures in the couple relationship. Many couples come to family therapy at this stage and quickly realise the couple relationship, as well as the parenting relationship, is in need of some adjustment.

Authoritative parenting

Authoritative, as opposed to authoritarian, parenting is responsive to children's age-related needs and ability. It typically has clear boundaries which are flexible and adaptive as children's needs change.

As adults we bring our own (often quite strong) beliefs to parenting. Our beliefs are based on whether we want to replicate our own experience or do something reparative. Insecure attachment can impact on parenting and relationships in a number of ways. Adults who have felt secure in childhood are more likely to have good adult relationships. However, sometimes, a good secure couple relationship can mitigate an insecure childhood experience.

Attachment and parenting styles

There are four major recognised parenting styles:

- Authoritative -responsive, clear expectations, consistent
- Authoritarian –demanding and reactionary
- Permissive –too responsive and undemanding
- Uninvolved – unresponsive and undemanding, disinterested

Our experiences of how we were responded to when we were children impact on how we see ourselves and the expectations we have in our relationships. This is particularly true at times when we feel frightened, anxious and uncertain. These form our internal working models and can be applied to any adult relationship.

Attachment work in couple and family therapy is layered and complex. It brings together our own and our partner's working models and seeks to understand how they impact on the couple's relationship, parenting and other relationships, including with colleagues and friends.

If we only worked in the behavioural domain, we would be doing our clients a disservice. We need to be able to acknowledge and understand our own processes and how our life experience has influenced our internal working model. With the help of a skilled therapist working systemically, you can change patterns that aren't working and make choices about the future.

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