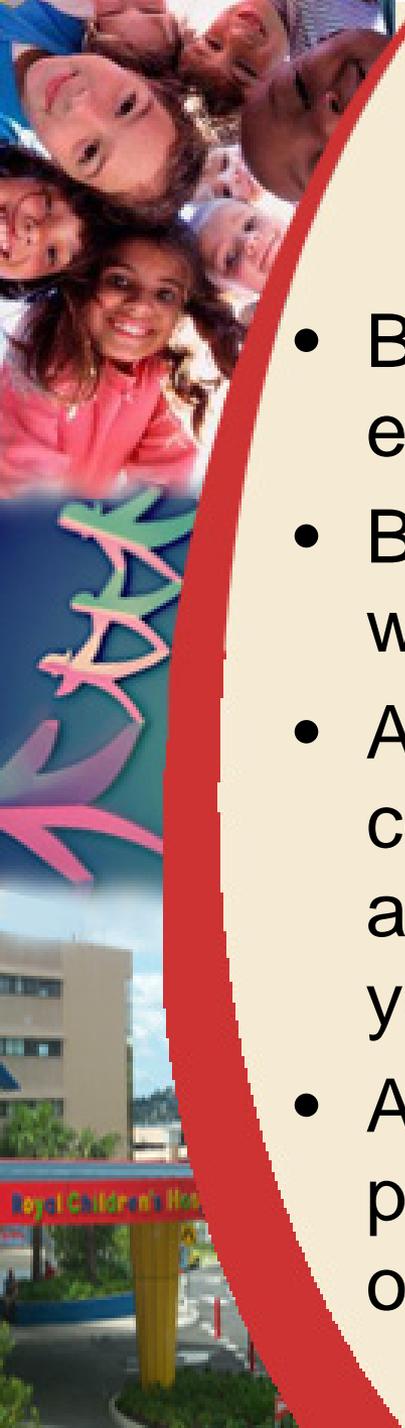


From Theory to Practice: The Importance of Secure Parent & Infant Attachment

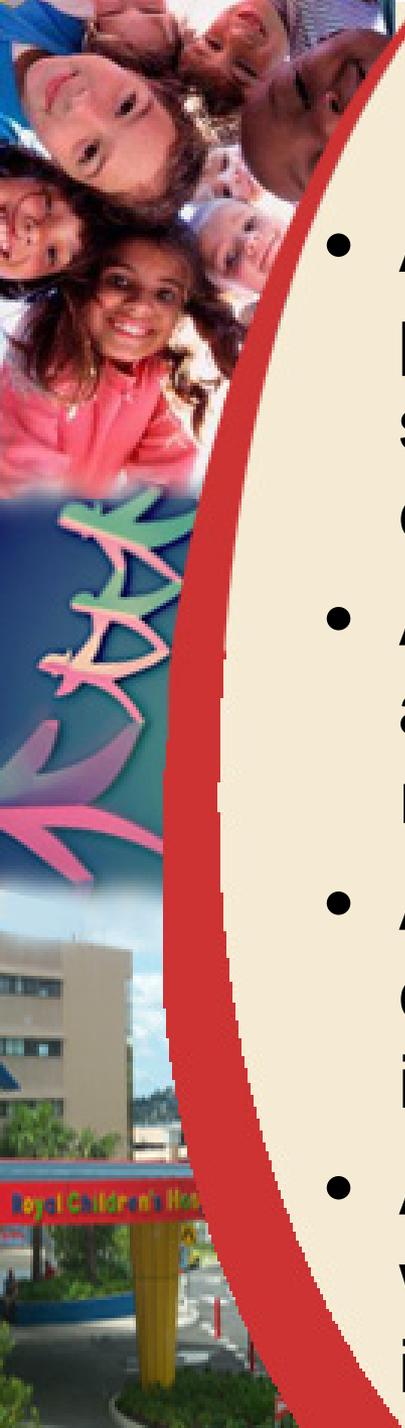


Presented by: Elisabeth Hoehn



Attachment - Background

- Bowlby - first emphasised importance of early relationships (1969/1972/1980/1982)
- Bowlby coined the term “Attachment”, which means “*wanting* to be near”
- Attachment is the deep and enduring connection established between a child and a parent/caregiver in the first several years of life (primarily first 3 years)
- Attachment is something that children and parents/caregivers create *together* in an ongoing reciprocal relationship



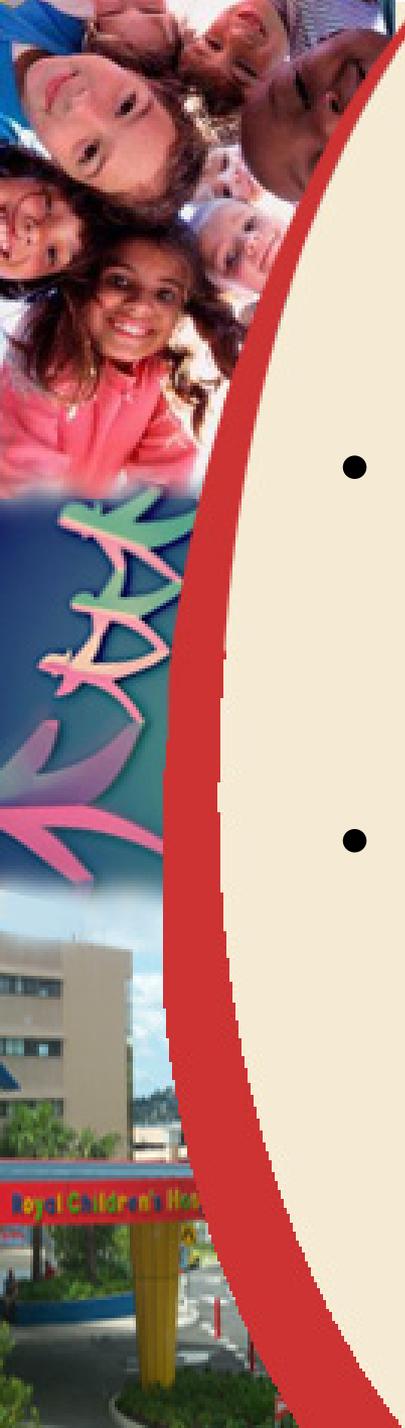
Attachment - Background

- Attachment to a protective and loving parent/caregiver who provides guidance and support is a basic human need, rooted in evolution
- Attachment profoundly influences every aspect of a person - mind, body, emotions, relationships and values
- Attachment has physiological, emotional, cognitive and social components and implications
- Attachment is a “mutual regulatory system” in which the baby and the parent/caregiver influence one another over time

Attachment - Background

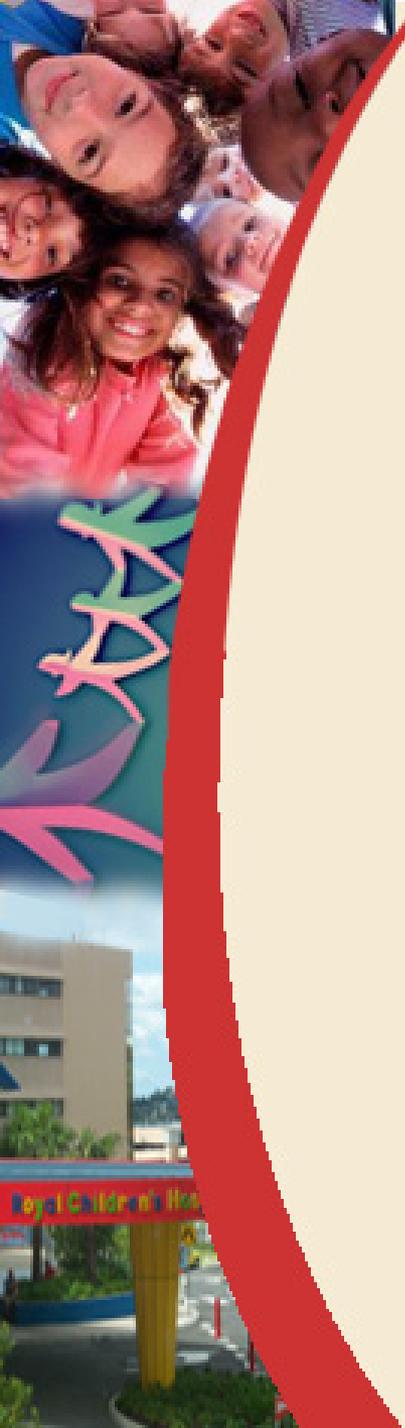
- There is a biological predisposition in infancy to maintain proximity to parents/caregivers which exists across many species (Hofer, 1994)
- As humans we have an instinct to form “secure” attachments
- Babies instinctively reach out for the safety of the “secure base” with parents/caregivers, who in turn instinctively protect and nurture their offspring providing a “safe haven”
- Instinctual attachment behaviours in the baby are activated by cues or signals from the parent/caregiver - social releasers





Attachment - Background

- The patterns of behaviour and the strategies used in relationships are influenced by caregiving history and temperament (Cassidy, 1994)
- These relationship patterns and strategies are termed “patterns of attachment” & can be reliably measured in a standardised laboratory procedure (Ainsworth et al., 1978)



Attachment Patterns

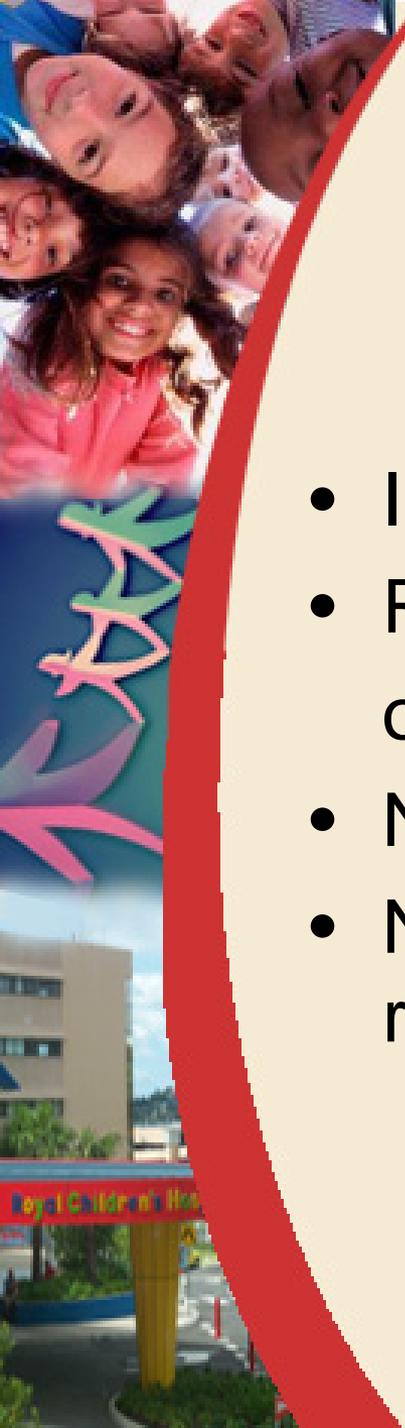
- **Secure**
Optimal level of arousal
- **Avoidant**
Down playing of emotional responses and display
- **Ambivalent/Anxious**
Heightened emotional display
- **Disorganised**
Chaotic emotional display



Secure Attachment

Can only be established in the context of a relationship that includes:

- Nurturing touch
- Eye contact
- Smile
- Positive affect
- Need fulfilment



Secure Attachment and Infant Brain Development

- Infant brain is undeveloped at birth
- Rapid growth occurs in the first three years of life (connections and networks)
- Neural differentiation is stimulation dependent
- Neurones change in response to patterned repetitive stimulation

5 Days

2 Months

1 Year

28 Years



RAPID EARLY DEVELOPMENT: *These PET scans suggest that the brain of a one year old more closely resembles an adult's brain than a newborn's.*

Source: H.T. Chugani



Secure Attachment and Infant Brain Development

- Connections develop between neurones in response to activation by experiences
- Activity-dependent fine-tuning of connections and pruning of surplus circuitry
- Synapses and connections develop into neural pathways that reflect the degree and type of input.

At Birth

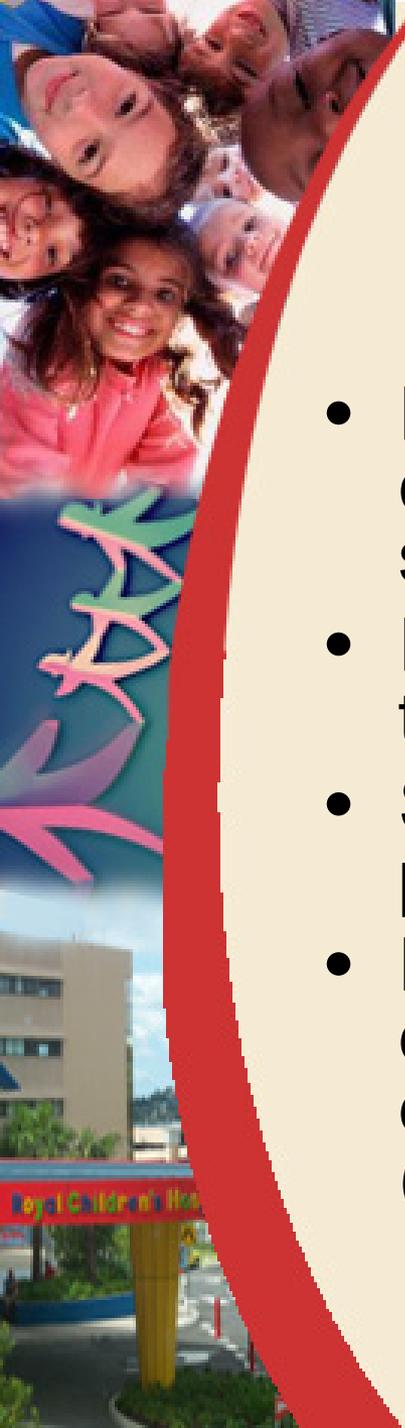


6 Years Old



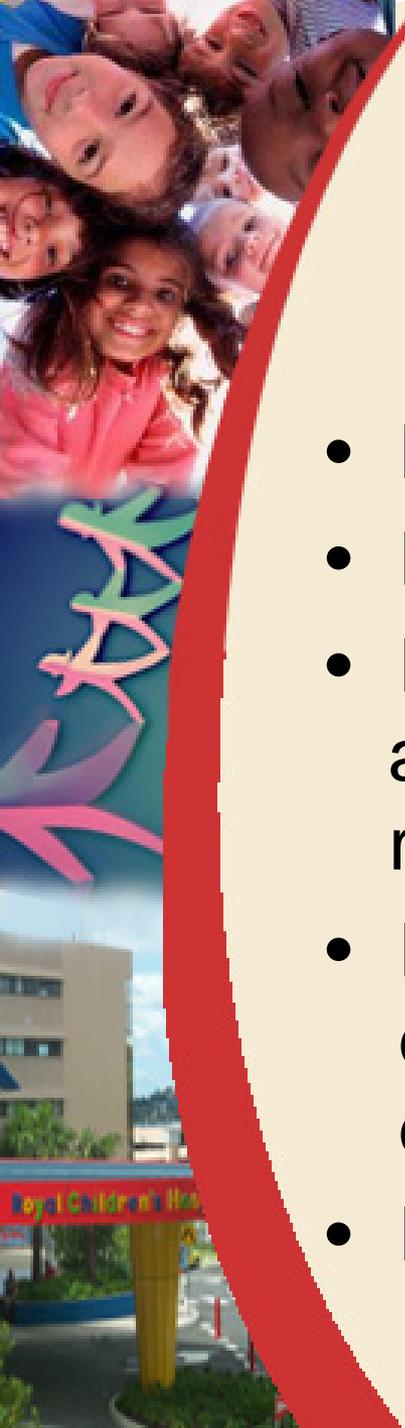
14 Years Old





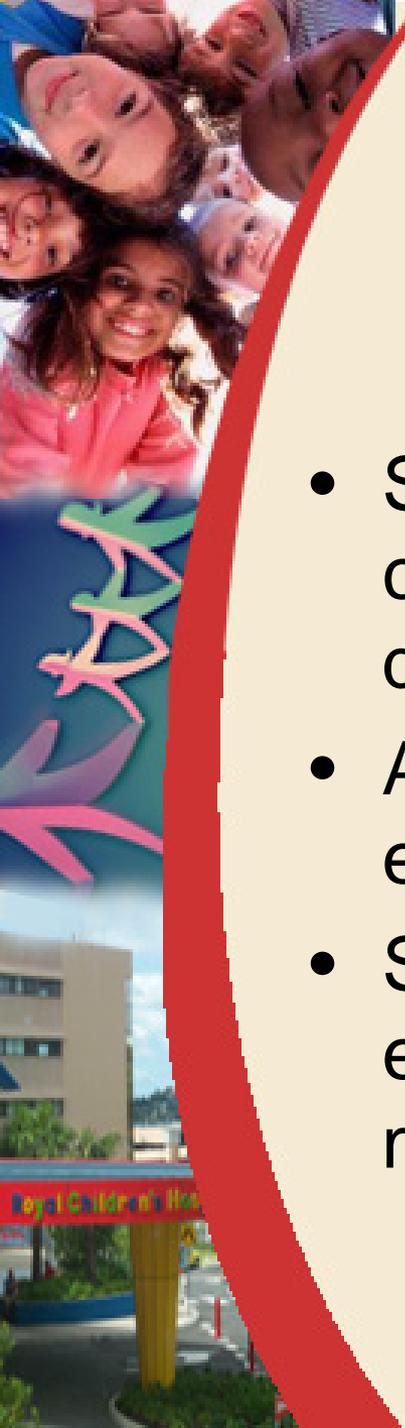
Secure Attachment and Infant Brain Development

- Experience shapes brain development - connections develop as the result of stimulation
- Environmental experience is critical to brain tissue differentiation
- Structure and function dependent on postnatal experience
- Development results from genetic endowment (nature's potential) and the experiences the infant brain encounters (nurture)



Secure Attachment and Infant Brain Development

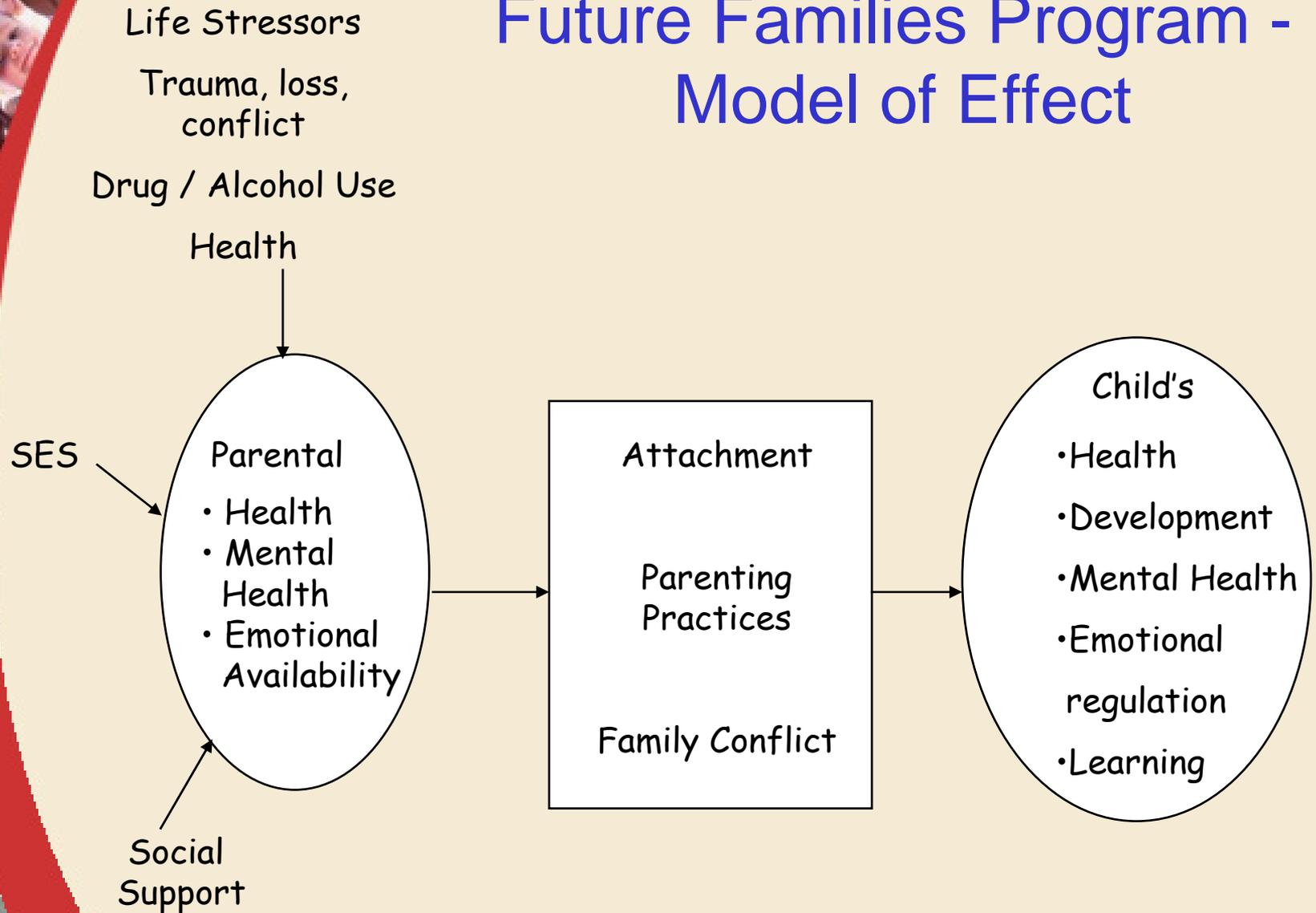
- Is promoted by secure attachment
- Requires a sharing of positive affective states
- Requires carer to maintain optimal arousal and act as an external neurobiological regulator
- Requires a “growth facilitating” interpersonal environment that positively effects the experience dependent maturation of the brain
- Is dependent on *dyadic* regulation of emotion



Secure Attachment and Infant Brain Development

- Sharing positive emotional states with a caretaker promotes brain growth and the development of regulatory capacities
- Attachment interactions allow for the emergence of biological control systems
- Secure attachment is internalised as an enduring capacity to regulate, generate and maintain states of emotional security

Future Families Program - Model of Effect

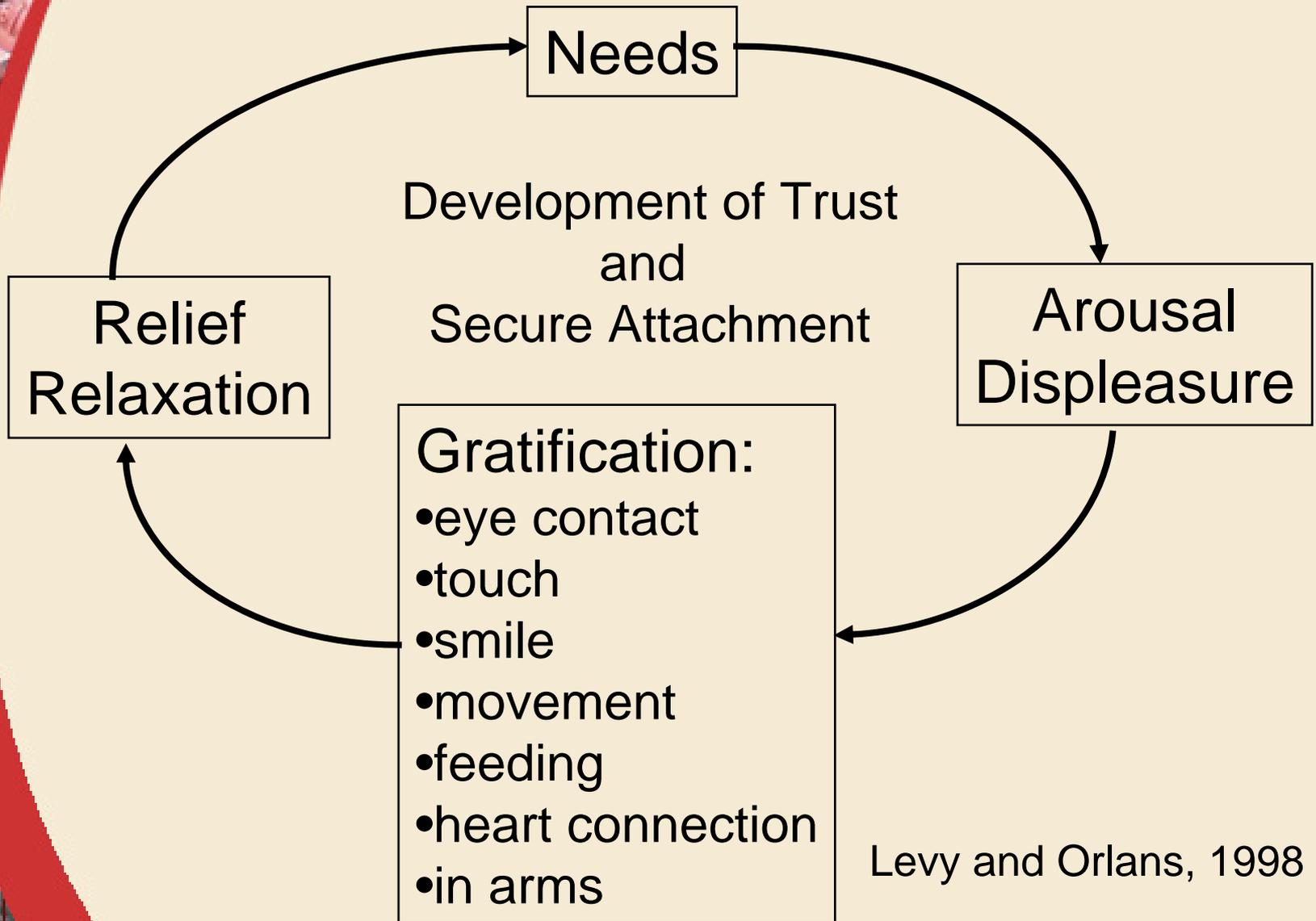




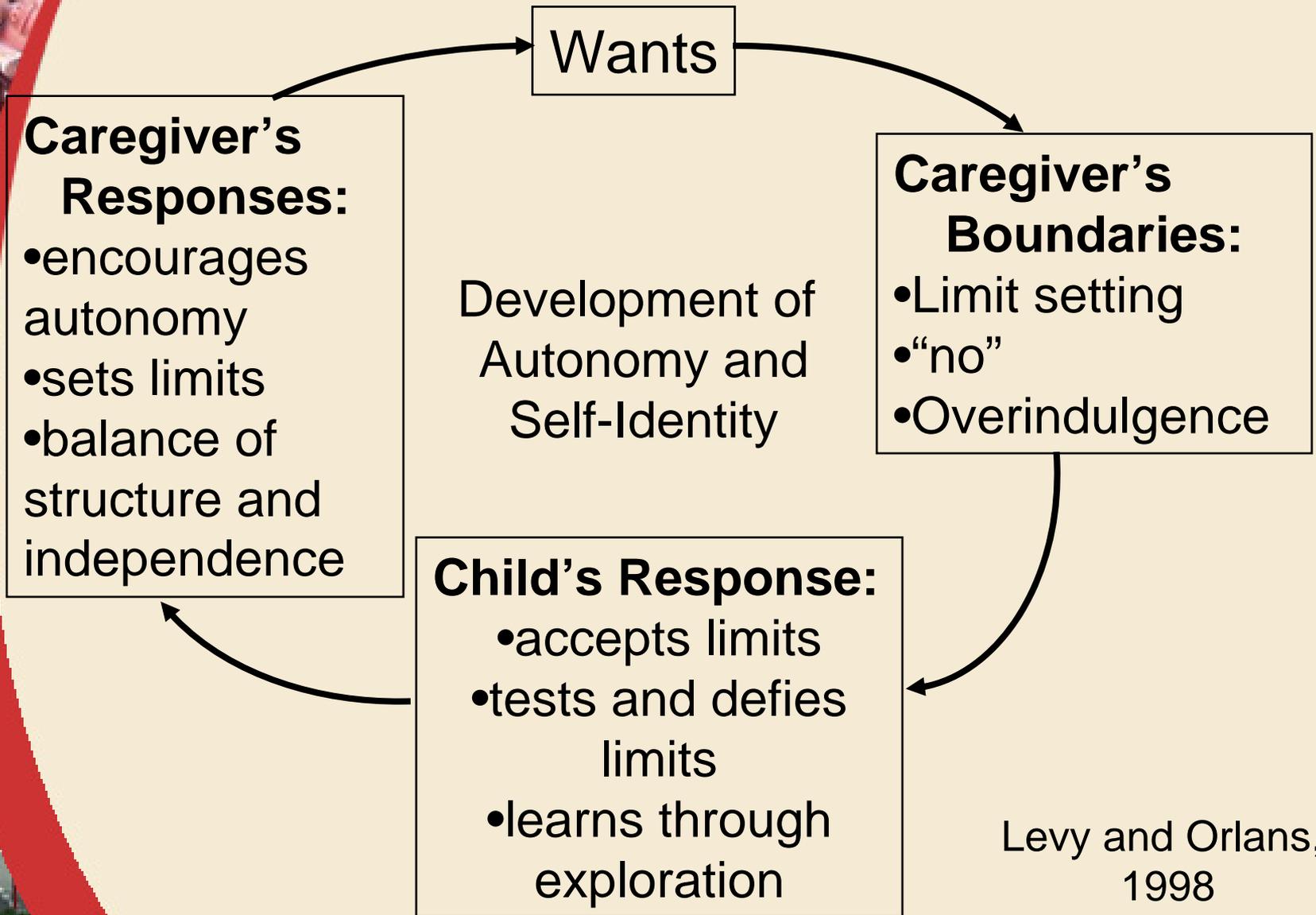
Secure Attachment - Outcome

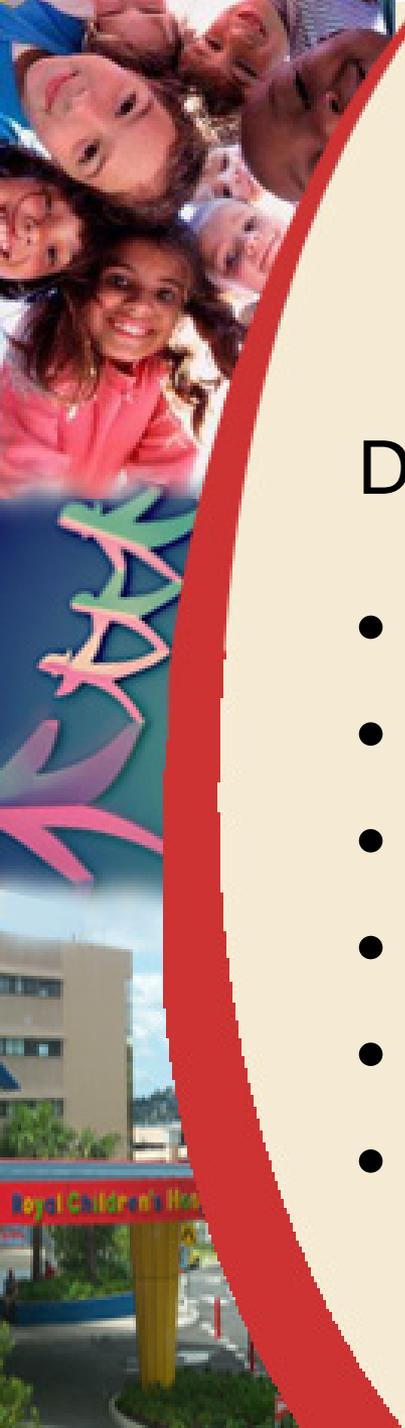
- Initial bond and nature of the attachment relationship provide a mechanism to cope with the outside world
- **Secure attachment requires *sensitive* and *consistent* parenting**

First-Year Attachment Cycle



Second Year Attachment Cycle

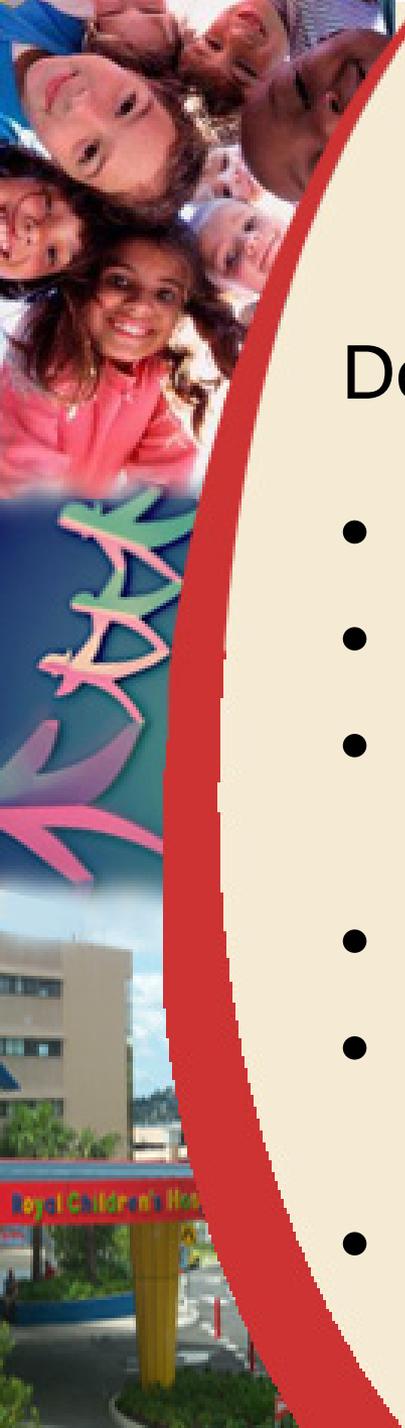




Securely Attached Infants and Young Children

Do better over time in the following areas:

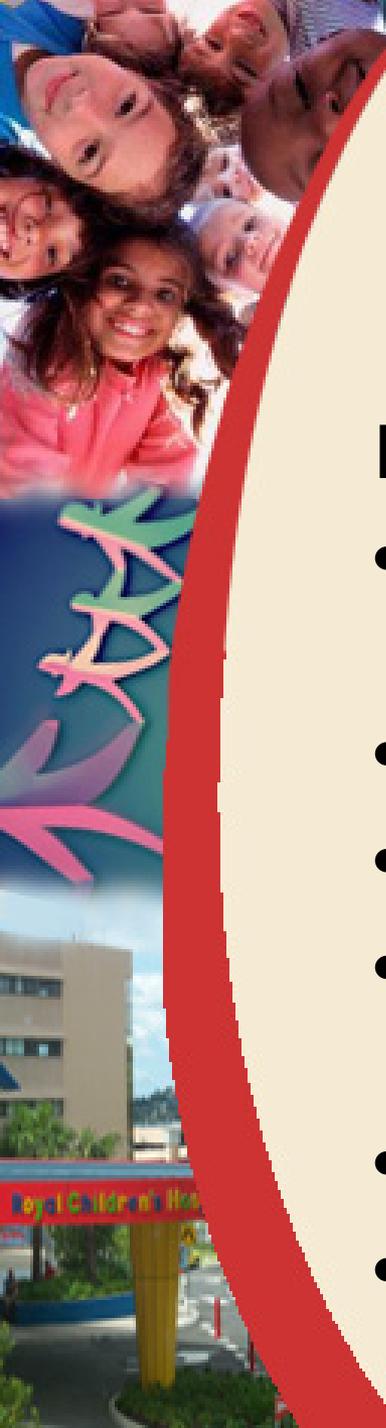
- self-esteem
- independence and autonomy
- resilience in the face of adversity
- ability to manage impulses and feelings
- long-term friendships
- relationships with parents, caregivers, and other authority figures



Securely Attached Infants and Young Children

Do better over time in the following areas:

- prosocial coping skills
- trust, intimacy, and affection
- positive and hopeful belief systems about self, family, and society
- empathy, compassion and conscience
- behavioural performance and academic success in school
- promoting secure attachment with their own children when they become adults



Disrupted Attachment - Infant Brain Development

Disrupted Attachment leads to:

- biochemical consequences in the developing brain
- abnormally high levels of stress hormones
- altered brain structure and function
- impaired growth and development of infant brains and bodies
- emotional and social problems
- vulnerability to stress, mental health problems, substance abuse

Disrupted Attachment - Causes

Parent contribution:

- abuse and/or neglect
- ineffective and insensitive care
- depression
- severe and/or chronic psychological disturbances
- teenage parenting
- substance abuse
- intergenerational attachment difficulties: unresolved family of origin issues, history of separation, loss, or maltreatment
- prolonged absence: prison, hospital, desertion

Disrupted Attachment - Causes

Child contributions:

- difficult temperament; lack of “fit” with parents or caregivers
- premature birth
- medical conditions, chronic pain, colicky
- hospitalisations: separation, loss
- failure to thrive
- congenital and/or biological problems: neurological impairment, fetal alcohol syndrome, in utero drug exposure, physical handicaps
- genetic factors: mental health problems, substance abuse





Disrupted Attachment - Causes

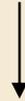
Environmental contributions:

- poverty
- violence: victim and/or witness
- lack of support: absent father and extended family, isolation, lack of services
- multiple out of home placements: multiple caregivers, foster care moves
- high stress: marital conflict, family disorganisation and chaos, violent community
- lack of stimulation



Disrupted Attachment - Causes

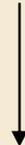
Parent's early attachment experiences



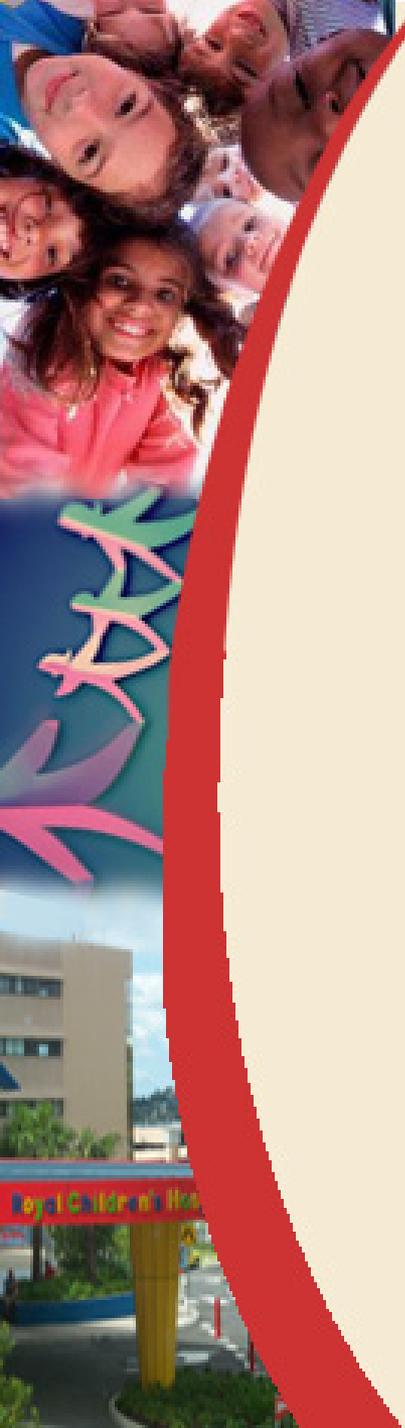
Parent's attachment representations
(internal working model)



Parenting behaviour



Infant's attachment experiences



Disrupted Attachment - Outcome

Children with compromised and disrupted attachment are at risk of serious problems:

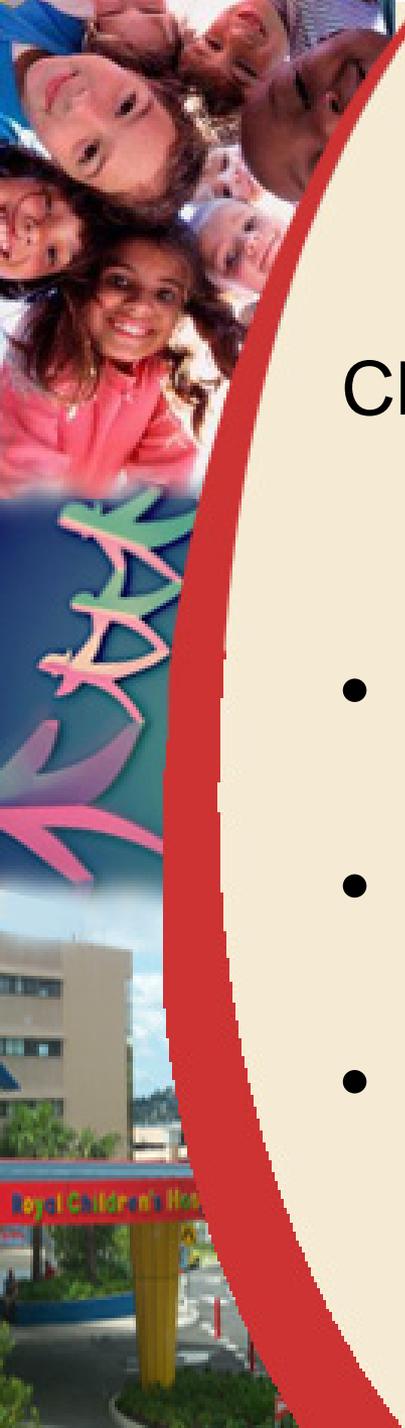
- low self-esteem
- needy, clingy, or pseudoindependent
- decompensate when faced with stress or adversity
- lack of self-control
- unable to develop and maintain friendships



Disrupted Attachment - Outcome

Children with compromised and disrupted attachment are at risk of serious problems:

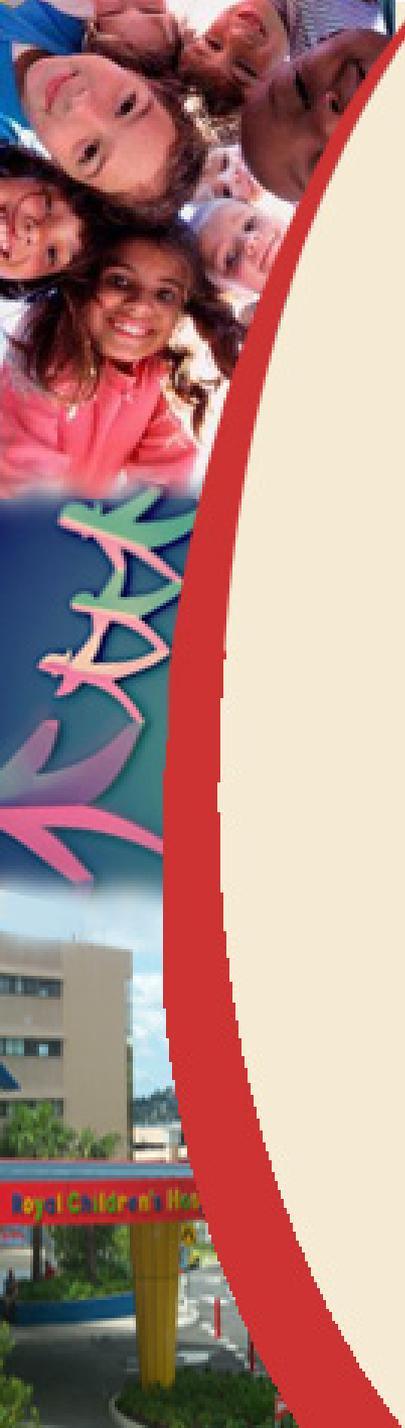
- alienated from and oppositional with parents, caregivers, and other authority figures
- antisocial attitudes and behaviours
- aggression and violence
- incapable of genuine trust, intimacy, affection
- Negative, hopeless, and pessimistic view of self, family, and society



Disrupted Attachment - Outcome

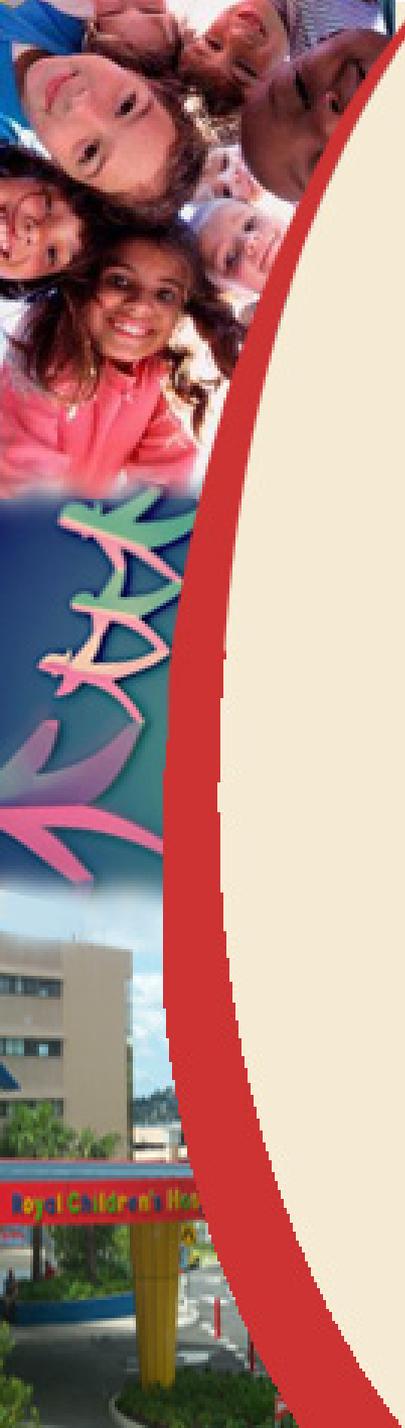
Children with compromised and disrupted attachment are at risk of serious problems:

- Lack of empathy, compassion, and remorse
- Behavioural and academic problems at school
- Perpetuate the cycle of maltreatment and disrupted attachment in their own children when they reach adulthood



Bottom line

We are relational beings. Our brain develops optimally *only* within the context of a secure relationship.



Care Seeking (Attachment)

Instinct to seek proximity to a specific person who will comfort protect and/or organize one's feelings.



Care Giving (Bonding)

Instinct to monitor a specific person, and to comfort, protect, and/or organize that person's feelings when necessary.



Exploration

Instinct to follow one's innate curiosity and desire for mastery, when it feels safe to do so.

CIRCLE OF SECURITY

PARENT ATTENDING TO THE CHILD'S NEEDS

I need you to



Support My Exploration



Watch over me

- Help me
- Enjoy with me

I need you to



Welcome My Coming To You

SECURE
BASE

SAFE
HAVEN

- Protect me
- Comfort me
- Delight in me
- Organize my feelings

