



Gwasanaeth
Mabwysiadu
Cenedlaethol

National
Adoption
Service

Achieving More Together / Cyflawni Mwy Gyda'n Gilydd
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The NAS Post Adoption Training and Development Framework

- ▶ These materials have been developed for the National Adoption Service for adoptive families
- ▶ Their purpose is to provide a learning and development resource for adopters post placement
- ▶ These tools can be used by groups or by individuals.
- ▶ There is lots of information in the notes below each slide so it is important to read these too as they provide much more information, and some useful ideas for more reading.

Attachment Theory:

The relevance for parenting adopted children

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this module you will have learnt..

- ▶ What people mean when they talk about attachment theory.
- ▶ How attachment theory can help us understand how children's brains develop.
- ▶ Why this is important to children's development and behaviour later on.
- ▶ How these ideas could support adoptive parents to build relationships with their children

Adoptive parents writing these materials want to acknowledge that it can be tough!

That's ok – we don't always get it right – after a tough day, just remember that you can start again tomorrow!

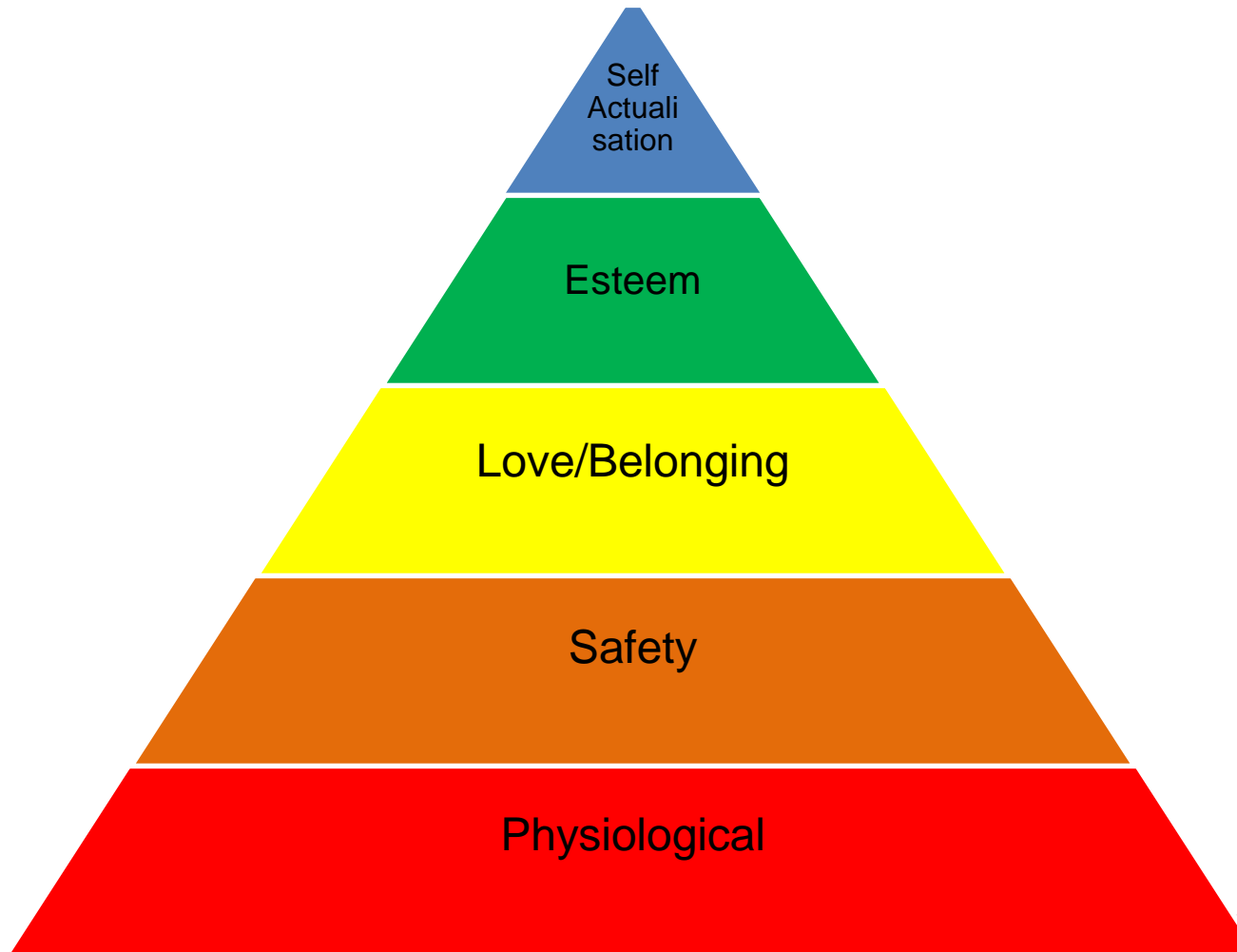
“I found it helpful when someone said ‘Aiming for perfection is not good enough; good enough is good enough’”

Why is attachment theory helpful for adopters?

- ▶ Using attachment theory can help us to understand how children make relationships in the here and now, by better understanding their past experiences and how these have impacted their core identity, social and emotional development and brain development (see Health and Development course).
- ▶ If the adults around a child can share an understanding of how a child experiences the world, and develop a shared approach to supporting the child and responding to any difficulties, then trusting, secure relationships can be built and outcomes will be improved.

Child's Basic Needs

Maslow:



What do we mean by attachment?

“Attachment is formed through a consistent caring relationship between adult and child, activated as a result of stress (physical needs, threats, interrupted relationships etc) and enacted through physical care involving physical closeness and body contact which meets the child's basic needs for physical and emotional comfort. Hallmarks are reciprocity and continuity”

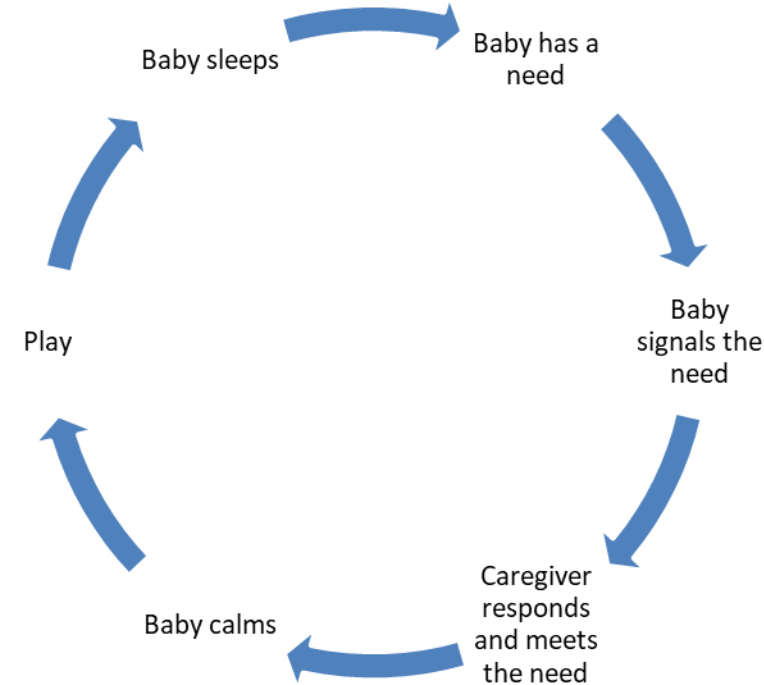
Beesley 2010

Attachment and Brain Development

- ▶ Attachment is important because what we know is that a baby's brain development is affected by the parenting they receive.
- ▶ As brain imaging technology has developed we have become more aware of how these early relationship impact on brain development.
- ▶ Positive interactions support the development of neural connections.

The Caregiving Cycle

- ▶ When the baby / child displays a need
- ▶ The caregiver responds in a timely and consistent manner
- ▶ The baby/ child feels safe and is able to engage in other things e.g. play, exploration.
- ▶ This is called a the caregiving (or arousal relaxation) cycle.
- ▶ When needs are met in this way secure attachments develop and infants/ children are free to explore their environment.



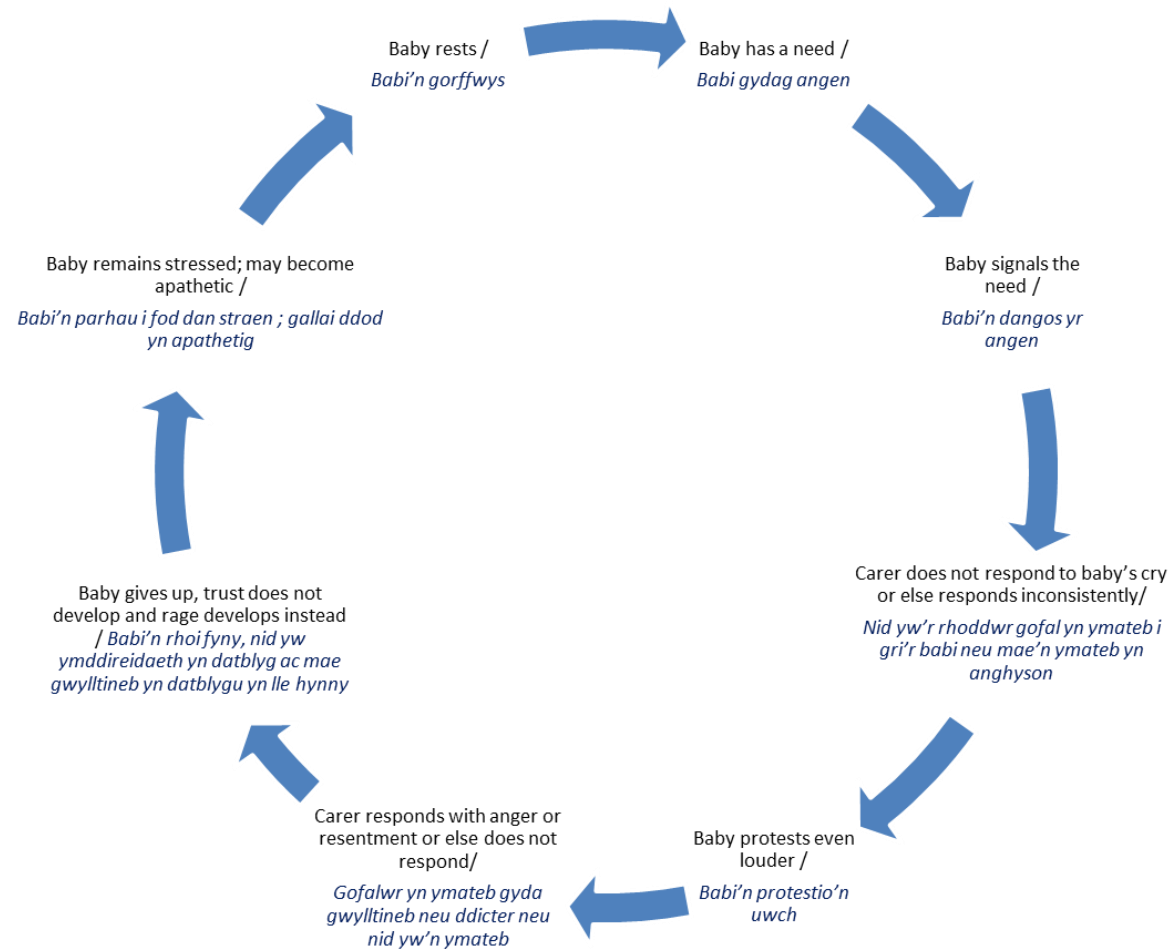
Secure Attachments

- ▶ Secure infants and children who have experienced secure base parenting that is
 - Available, mind-minded, attuned, and sensitive to their needs
 - Supportive of exploration, effectiveness and co-operation
 - Builds self esteem
- ▶ Through these interactions babies and children also develop a core belief about themselves and they use this to make a subconscious assumption about whether they are loveable and whether others are reliable and trust worthy.
- ▶ This is called your internal working model.

Internal Working Models

- ▶ These learnt patterns of behaviour, so called internal working models, are strong influences on how children will view the actions of subsequent caregivers like foster carers and adoptive parents.
- ▶ This means that they will anticipate that you will behave in the same way as their first set of caregivers and so they will respond in the same way, even if you are behaving very differently.
- ▶ Because these things are learnt before babies have the brain development that enables them to think, they are difficult patterns to change.

When Caregiving is Inconsistent



Self concept: Internal Working Model

Secure

I am good,
lovable, safe

Others are
reliable,
trustworthy
loving, safe

Insecure

I don't know if I
am good or bad.
Lovable or not.
Safe or not

I don't get others.
I need to keep
testing,
controlling,
checking

Disorganised

I am bad,
unlovable,
unsafe

Others are
unreliable,
untrustworthy,
unsafe

Avoidant Attachment Styles

- ▶ Avoidant infants and children have experienced parenting that
 - Was rejecting of their emotional demands
 - Was intrusive/ insensitive to their needs
 - Devalued their feelings
 - Gave the message “don’t make a fuss – be self-reliant”
 - Didn’t support exploration and co-operation
 - Was not conducive to building their self-esteem
- ▶ Babies and children adapt to this kind of caregiving by shutting down on their feelings, deactivating attachment behaviour and relying on themselves.

Ambivalent Attachment Styles

- ▶ Ambivalent babies and children have experienced parenting that is:
 - Insensitive and only intermittently available
 - Uncertain and unpredictable
 - Sentimental, but the adult is preoccupied with their own emotional concerns
 - Not supportive of exploration and co-operation
 - Not conducive to building the child's self-esteem
 - Preoccupied with anger
- ▶ Infants and children adapt to this kind of caregiving by hyper activating their attachment behaviour and making constant demands in the hope of getting care and attention.

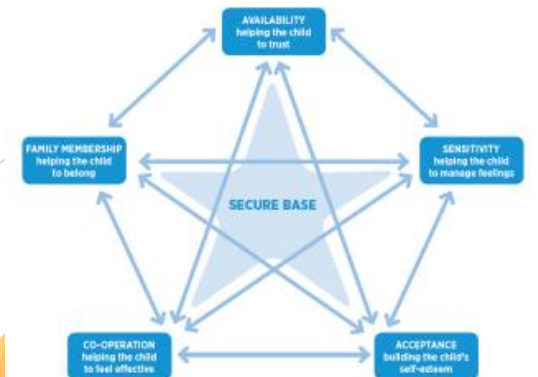
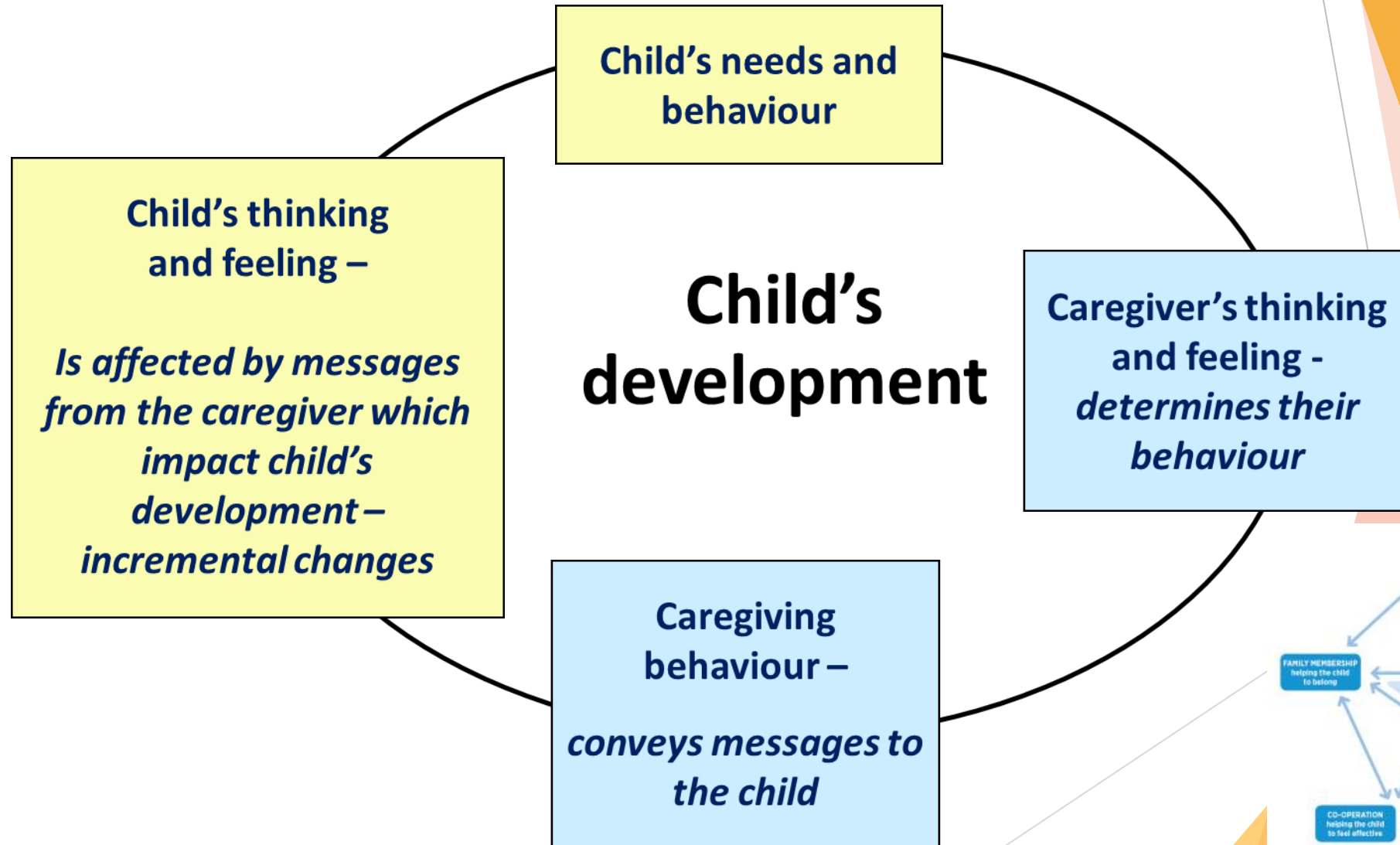
Disorganised Attachments

- ▶ Disorganised infants and children have experienced parenting that is:
 - Frightened or frightening
 - Insensitive and unavailable
 - Helpless or hostile
 - Intrusive
 - Not supportive of exploration and co-operation
 - Not conducive to building self esteem
 - Negative about the child and the self
- ▶ Caregivers who are frightened or frightening leave the infants with an insoluble dilemma – if they approach their caregiver for security or safety, the caregiver is experienced as frightening rather than protective.
- ▶ Parent who should be source of safety is also threat – this leaves child with no effective strategy to deal with anxiety or stress

What does this mean for our family?

- ▶ It's worth remembering that many people have insecure styles and lead perfectly happy and successful lives.
- ▶ Many adopters find that they parent differently once they start thinking about their child's attachment style because they start to explore and understand
 - how does their child use them, as their attachment figure, to feel safe.
 - what is it about their caregiving that triggers the child's defence mechanism?
 - why does the child always seem to need to be in control?
 - why is it sometimes that how the child is behaving doesn't seem to be related to what's actually happening?

The Caregiving Cycle



A Health Warning!

- ▶ It's important to recognise the distinction between the 'attachment style' and 'attachment disorders'. They are different things.
 - Attachment styles describe patterns in relationship formation.
 - Attachment disorders are clinical mental health conditions that need to be diagnosed by medical practitioners.
- ▶ If you are concerned about a child's mental health it's really important to talk with people in your adoption support service and your medical service – start with your GP.

Attachment across the Population

- ▶ Across the populations the split in attachment styles is reported as being
- ▶ 59% people have secure attachments
- ▶ 25% avoidant attachments
- ▶ 11% anxious attachments
- ▶ The figure for people with disorganised attachments styles is therefore around 5%, however it rises to about 80% when you look at children who have been abused.

Managing Stress

- ▶ Early caregiving relationships are the way in which babies learn to regulate stress.
- ▶ When an baby has a need, and usually they then cry – they have an increase in their levels of adrenalin and cortisol - that's a stress response.
- ▶ The baby's crying will evoke a stress response in an attached caregiver – so they will produce adrenalin and cortisol too.
- ▶ When the caregiver responds – the baby is fed, rocked, soothed etc - the caregiver calms i.e. their adrenalin and cortisol levels reduce.
- ▶ The baby's body response mirrors that of the caregiver ie their adrenalin and cortisol levels reduce, and they are calmed.
- ▶ In this way our bodies learn to regulate stress.

Reparative Parenting

- ▶ It's vital to remember that well informed therapeutic reparenting can really help children and young people live with the impact of poor early years experiences – that's what you are doing!

'It's really good to understand why our children behave as they do. Knowing about attachment helped me to adapt my parenting and my expectations became realistic. It took time, but it really did work out for us as a family'

Adoptive parent

Key Messages

This was what they wanted you to hear

Do look for information,
don't be scared to ask for help
Do look after yourself!

That's ok – we don't always
get it right – after a tough
day, just remember that you
can start again tomorrow!

“I found it helpful when
someone said ‘Aiming for
perfection is not good
enough; good enough is
good enough’”

Summary

- ▶ Knowing about attachment theory can help suggest different way of parenting that adoptive parents find useful.
- ▶ The driver for the behaviour may not be in the here and now. It could be
 - something that the child anticipates because of their prior learning about how caregivers will respond
 - a feeling they experience e.g. they may feel unsafe because they cannot use caregivers to help them feel safe
 - A feeling that they are unable to regulate.
- ▶ Positive, responsive caregiving is always a good thing for children, even though they might not always show you this through their responses.

- ▶ This course is part of a series developed by the National Adoption Service to support adopters after approval.
- ▶ These can be accessed at the National Adoption Service website.
- ▶ Please talk to your adoption support team for further information