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Beyond the box: Rethinking attachment as a protective mechanism

Elizabeth Cara, Rondalyn Whitney, Carolyn Glogoski
San Jose State University, San Jose, CA, United States

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Introduction: This poster will discuss the theory of attachment as a protective mechanism for high risk children and teenagers(Larsson, Eatorn, Madsen, Vestergaard, Olsen, Agergo et al., 2005), and how to foster responsive caregiving and attachment bonds in occupations for these youth and the systems in which they are embedded. **The objectives** are to enhance understanding of attachment theory, and suggest interventions.

Description and Discussion: Attachment is a concept to think of when planning intervention with infants and families (Schultz-Krohn & Cara., 2000). That is, intervention plans may incorporate how to develop these bonds through occupations. Such plans are validated by recent research (Larsson, Eatorn, Madsen, Vestergaard, Olsen, Agergo et al., 2005). Attachment influences security, feelings of trust, and the emergence of self-regulation skills. Disregulated, distrustful, or insecure behavior may be consistently found in high-risk children including any youth with developmental or autism spectrum disorders. Parents of dsyregulated children are particularly vulnerable to "dis-attachment" due to these challenging behaviors of children with special needs, particularly those with social disabilities (Cronin, 2004).

Adolescents who are placed in many foster homes (with unrelated families) are also a high risk population who may display disregulated, distrustful, or insecure behavior. Numerous foster care home placements are associated with increased risk of illegal activity, incarceration, homelessness, early pregnancy, and dating violence. Attention to supporting foster care adolescents in creating meaningful relationships with significant adults or mentors can be a major contribution by occupational therapists. **Conclusion:** Although there may be different systems for caring for children and teens in other countries, this information may apply to all youth who are not living with their birth families, and to caregivers of high-risk children and adolescents. It will suggest strategies in occupational therapy practice. **Contribution to Practice:** This presentation links evidence-based current research with contemporary occupational therapy practice how to apply recent findings and models in practice.