

Rachel introduces herself and her story in an earlier podcast: Series 1. Family Matters (1 & 2) Episodes 14 & 15. We invite listeners to listen to these again to fully appreciate how well she understands Secure Attachment - the subject of this amazing podcast.

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*Secure attachment... probably THE most important thing to understand as we care for young children.*

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### What does it mean to be 'securely attached'?

Rachel explains that being securely attached means... "to know, because you *KNOW*, because you *KNOW* because you **KNOW!** someone is there for you... this 'knowing' is internal".'

### When does this start?

As a baby develops in the womb, they are connected, *in tune* with the mother. They sense her movements, her heartbeat, her rhythms. The connection or attachment continues after birth. Typically, the birth mother is the baby's initial primary caregiver, although this is not necessarily the case. The important thing is that attachment with an infant's primary caregiver continues through infancy. This is foundational for the child's future relationships into adulthood.



Such images speak two-fold aspects of attachment...

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1. *"You are the apple of my eye...see how I look at you and how you look at me!"*
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For most primary caregivers, this two-way attachment is intuitive. With Rachel's experience, she has learnt to be 'intentionally intuitive' as she parents her fostered and adopted children. For children without a seamless post-natal attachment to their birth mother, this attachment



must be developed. Rachel, as an adoptive and foster parent, she needs to find out how to make sure these children attach securely to her.

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2. *"You are my place of safety from where I can explore and to whom I return for comfort".*

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Children are hard-wired to explore and experience their world. Being securely attached means that they KNOW they have a safe place to return to for comfort and assurance. Primary caregivers provide this secure base and as they grow, it is usually shared with others.

### The Strange Situation

Theorists, such as Bowlby initiated the conversation and research into this vitally important field. Mary Ainsworth's observation of children's responses in *Strange Situations* is well-documented. Ongoing research and neuroscience confirm the crucial role of secure attachment throughout children's early years.

### What does secure attachment look like in practice?

Children who are securely attached may well cling to their carer when in a new situation. In time, they will begin to explore, regularly look back, checking-in with their carer, often returning to them before moving away to explore a little more confidently. Their behaviour might appear to be 'clingy', but their behaviour communicates...

*"I need to know you are there while I explore this new situation... I need to know you will be there when I need you!"*

It takes trust and confidence to explore independently. The young child is learning to trust that their caregiver is still there and will be there when needed.

When a child knows they are delighted in (you are the apple of my eye), they are filled with joyful exuberance, an energy that may play out in naughtiness. Again, this is indicative of their knowing that they are loved unconditionally. They are securely attached.

Conversely, a child without a consistent primary caregiver and those who have a less secure back-story, may well behave outwardly more confidently and independently. Their self-reliance (sometimes interpreted as resilience) masks an inner need.

### When things go wrong

None of us are perfect and all of us respond to many of life's challenges imperfectly. Rachel assures us that *"all is not lost if things haven't gone perfectly well... the important thing is to know how to rectify what has gone wrong."*

This might be relatively simple, such as putting away distractions being present when our child needs us to be, such as when collecting our child from nursery or school.



### Some helpful tools...

Rachel references some resources, which practitioners, teachers, parents and caregivers find helpful.

#### 1. **Co-Regulation.**

In charged situations, when a child is overwhelmed by emotion, adults may respond in various ways,

1. Non-responsive adult. This does not help the child to become independent.
2. Over-supportive adult. This does not help either. Children need to experience some stress to learn to respond to life events.
3. The adult who **co-regulates** models how to respond to the situation. They actively support the child, helping them to name and understand their emotions, to manage their responses and fly!

#### 2. **PACE**

Rachel introduces us to the work of Dan Hughes who developed **PACE** in his work with families who are at breaking point. These four headings (**Playfulness – Acceptance – Curiosity – Empathy**) are helpful for all carers who wish to support children through emotionally charged situations.

We will return to explore PACE in more detail in an upcoming Turning Little Stones podcast.

#### 3. **The Secure-Base Model**

Grounded in sound theory and written by Prof. Schofield and Dr. Beek, Rachel commends this practical and accessible resource for practitioners, teachers and those who want to support children in this key area of attachment.

### And finally...

With the perspective of being a teacher, an adopted child, then parenting three-ways (birth son, adopted daughter and long-term fostered son), Rachel is well placed to assure us that there is always HOPE.

Our role as adults is to support our children however and wherever we can as they learn to become...

**...Securely Attached.**

*Further information, practical guidance and advice are available through,*

***Turning Little Stones* (Series 1, Episodes 14, 15 & 29) & *Delving a little Deeper***

*See website for details.*

*We're delighted that Rachel will soon be releasing a new podcast show... We'll let you know just as soon as it is live!*