

Day Care
(Good or Not So Much?)
By Don L Corrington

It is generally recognized that the development of an attachment first occurs between an infant and the primary caregiver who is usually the mother. The fear of strangers occurs shortly after the forming of the initial attachment. Additional attachments are then formed with other individuals within the infant's immediate surroundings, such as fathers, grandparents and older siblings. An attachment to the father seems to normally occur within a year of an attachment to the mother

Fathers play a distinct role in the lives of their children. Mothers and fathers seem to engage in different types of interactions with their children. Fathers place an emphasis on physical play, mentorship, and encouragement in the face of challenges. Fathers who lend sensitive support for their children's autonomous exploration in the preschool years make a larger unique contribution to the prediction of the child's emotional security at age 16, more so than a mother's support according to research conducted by Karin Grossman in 2002.

The placement of young children into day care can potentially have both positive and negative effects on the physical, cognitive and emotional development of a child.

The age of the child at entry into day care is significant, both to the mother and the child. If the child is admitted into day care during infancy, the possibility of the attachment process may be compromised.

Several recently released long-term studies found that infants placed in child care are more likely to misbehave at school or get into fights by the time they reach sixth grade. Teachers also reported that they seem more argumentative.. Dr. Jay Belsky of Birkbeck University at London, speculates this may be because these babies do not form secure attachments, leading to the later problems.

However, it has also been observed that babies who were placed in high-quality day-care situations often develop a better vocabulary. This was determined by testing long-term study participants in the fifth grade. This effect might be related to early exposure to adult conversation.

Young children tended to develop stronger social skills in day care. High-quality child care can serve as a foundation for a baby's cognitive development, preparing him for higher academic achievement once he enters school. This may be the result of being provided intellectual stimulation during the early developmental period, leading to better performance in reading, math and memory-related tasks.

Dr. Shari Nethersole, a pediatrician at Children's Hospital in Boston, cautions that babies in group child-care situations tend to get more infections as they are exposed to many other youngsters. Infant diarrhea is particularly common.

It has been suggested that infants in nurseries and day care centers form attachments to their caregivers that are independent of their attachments to parents. Stable caregivers who are well known to the children will evoke stronger attachment behaviors and the security of such attachments appears to be a function of sensitive care (Howes & Hamilton, 1992a,b).

Quality of care in a day care facility can be improved by training directed at increasing caregivers' sensitivity to infant needs. According to reported research by Howes, Matheson, & Hamilton, in 1994, secure attachments to caregivers have been shown to be associated with a range of positive outcomes for children such as more creative and sociable play, but changes of caregivers or other disruptions can produce negative outcomes such as increased aggression.

It should be noted that not all countries define nor approach day care for children in the same manner. For example some claim that child group care is of more uniformly of good quality in some European countries such as Germany, Norway and France. Also, American child care conditions may differ markedly from European equivalents. As an example, "Home-Care Provision" or "Family Daycare", is quite different from the UK "Child Minding".

There does not seem to be a consensus among the various research studies regarding the effects of child day care; with sometimes completely opposing interruptions of the same data by different individuals existing.

Therefore, the decision to place a child into day care, ultimately rests with the parents, and the circumstances existing that may necessitate a child attending a day care facility. It would appear though that an investigation of not only the hygienic aspects of such a facility but also the quality and longevity of the staff is crucial. However, it would be important to realize that a child securely attached to his mother and additionally attached to his father will fair best.