



Society for Research in Child Development

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PRESS RELEASE

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Message to Mom: Don't Worry – You're Still Number One with Your Toddler

As any mother with a child in day care can tell you, a major worry is that Junior will develop a stronger bond with his daycare provider than with his mother. Now a study published in the May/June issue of the journal *Child Development* should put their minds at ease. The study, by researchers at the Free University of Berlin, the University of Magdeburg-Stendal and Technical University of Dresden, all in Germany, and the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom, found that while child/parent and child/care provider relationships share some important associations, children are much more likely to form secure attachments to their mothers than to their daycare providers.

To reach their conclusions, the authors re-examined the results of 40 studies of nearly 3,000 children with an average age of two-and-a-half. The researchers used the same types of measures that assess children's relationships with their parents to assess the relationships formed between the children and the adults responsible for them in childcare facilities.

The researchers found small but reliable associations between measures of child-mother, child-father, and child-care provider relationships, suggesting that different significant relationships with adults seem to bear some similar characteristics. However, they also found that these interaction characteristics were dependent on specific care provider, rather than being a generalizable form of attachment.

Other findings include:

- How the children felt about their care provider was strongly related to the provider's behavior towards the group of kids in the daycare center, rather than to any individualized attention.
- Children were less likely to form secure attachments to their childcare provider than their parents.
- The longer the children had been enrolled in the daycare facility, the more likely they were to have secure relationships with their care providers, underscoring the importance of stability of care.
- Girls were more likely than boys to have positive relationships with care providers, a finding that may reflect the fact that groups of girls attract more positive attention from care providers, who are overwhelmingly likely to be female themselves.

“Given the growing evidence that relationships with care providers have an important impact on children's development, this study's findings help pinpoint the features of those relationships most likely to affect children's later behavioral and socio-emotional functioning in the most positive ways,” said lead researcher Lieselotte Ahnert, professor for developmental psychology at the University of Applied Science in Magdeburg-Stendal and Free University of Berlin.

“In contrast to earlier concepts on childcare providers' functions, however, we should not see care providers in public care as mother substitutes, dealing sensitively with individual kids, but understand how they regulate groups of kids while providing a harmonic climate to play and learn.”

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Summarized from Child Development, Vol. 77, Issue 3, Security of Children's Relationships with Non-Parental Care Providers: A Meta-Analysis by Ahnert L (Free University of Berlin), Pinquart M (Friedrich –Schiller-University of Jena and Technical University of Dresden, and Lamb ME (University of Cambridge). Copyright 2006 The Society for Research in Child Development, Inc. All rights reserved.