

# *Breastfeeding: A Psychological Perspective*

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# Contents



- ▶ Attachment Theory
- ▶ Neurobiology
- ▶ Breastfeeding for secure attachment and normal brain development



**Children have a biological *need* to be close to their caregiver/s.**



**Breastfeeding is a primary way of meeting that need.**





*It's not just about the milk...*



# Attachment Theory

- ▶ ‘Attachment’ has to do with the relationship between one person and another.
- ▶ Developed by John Bowlby (British Psychiatrist) in 1950s.

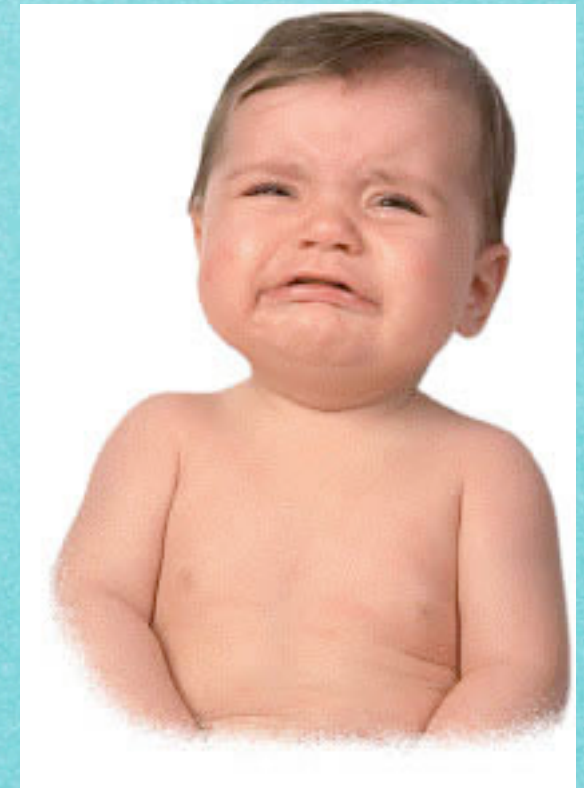




# Types of attachment



- ▶ **Secure** - trust their caregiver. Feel safe and loved.
- ▶ **Insecure** - cannot trust their caregiver. Mixture of feelings.





# Secure children:

- ▶ Cry less than insecure kids
- ▶ Can express their needs
- ▶ Increasingly independent
- ▶ Psychologically healthy
- ▶ Positive relationships







## Measuring Attachment: The Strange Situation



# Secure attachment

- ▶ Results from frequent and sustained physical contact with a primary caregiver,
- ▶ Sensitivity of that caregiver to the infant's signals, and
- ▶ **Reliable responsiveness**





# Insecure attachment

Three categories:



- ▶ **Ambivalent** - unpredictable parenting
- ▶ **Avoidant** - rejecting parenting
- ▶ **Disorganized** - frightening parenting



# Research Findings

- ▶ Attachment classification tends to remain stable into adulthood.
- ▶ Securely attached kids do better throughout life.





INSECURE ATTACHMENT		
Secure Attachment	Ambivalent Attachment	Avoidant Attachment
<p><b>PARENTING:</b> Warm, sensitive, consistent caregiver who responds quickly to baby's cries.</p>	<p><b>PARENTING:</b> Unpredictable or chaotic caregiver. Often attentive but out of sync with baby. Most tuned in to baby's fear.</p>	<p><b>PARENTING:</b> Emotionally unavailable or rejecting caregiver who dislikes "neediness". May push child to be 'independent'</p>
<p><b>BEHAVIOUR:</b> Baby uses mother as 'secure base' from which to explore. Cries least. Most compliant, and most easily put down after being held.</p>	<p><b>BEHAVIOUR:</b> Limited exploration. Baby cries a lot, is clingy and demanding. Often angry, upset by small separations, chronically anxious.</p>	<p><b>BEHAVIOUR:</b> Seeks little physical contact with caregiver (by 1 yr old), randomly angry. Unresponsive when held but upset when put down.</p>
<p><b>STRANGE SITUATION:</b> Actively seeks caregiver when distressed. Readily comforted.</p>	<p><b>STRANGE SITUATION:</b> Difficult to soothe after separation. Angry and seeking comfort simultaneously.</p>	<p><b>STRANGE SITUATION:</b> Avoids caregiver when distressed. Seems unmoved by separations.</p>

Summary of Attachment Patterns taken from Karen, 1998, pp. 443-445



Secure Attachment	Ambivalent Attachment	Avoidant Attachment
<p><b>PRESCHOOL:</b> Makes friends easily. Popular. Flexible and resilient under stress. Good self-esteem.</p>	<p><b>PRESCHOOL:</b> Fretful and easily overwhelmed by anxiety. Immature, overly dependent on teacher. May be victimized by bullies.</p>	<p><b>PRESCHOOL:</b> Often angry, aggressive, defiant. May be isolated &amp; disliked. Hangs around teachers. Withdraws when in pain.</p>
<p><b>PRESCHOOL TEACHERS:</b> Treat child in warm, matter-of-fact, age-appropriate ways.</p>	<p><b>PRESCHOOL TEACHERS:</b> Indulge, excuse, and treat child as less capable than others their age.</p>	<p><b>PRESCHOOL TEACHERS:</b> Become angry and controlling.</p>
<p><b>AT AGE SIX:</b> Warm and enthusiastic with parents. Open and meaningful exchanges. Comfortable with physical contact.</p>	<p><b>AT AGE SIX:</b> Mixes intimacy seeking with hostility towards parents. May be affectedly cute, ingratiating or worried when mother is absent.</p>	<p><b>AT AGE SIX:</b> Abrupt, neutral, unenthusiastic exchanges with parents. Absence of warm physical contact.</p>

Summary of Attachment Patterns taken from Karen, 1998, pp. 443-445



Secure Attachment	Ambivalent Attachment	Avoidant Attachment
<p>MIDDLE CHILDHOOD: Forms close friendships and is able to sustain them in larger peer groups.</p>	<p>MIDDLE CHILDHOOD: Trouble functioning in peer groups. Difficulty sustaining friendships when in larger group.</p>	<p>MIDDLE CHILDHOOD: No close friends or friendships marked by exclusivity, jealousy. Often isolated from the group.</p>
<p>SECURE ADULT: Easy access to wide range of feelings and memories (pos &amp; neg). Balanced view of parents. If insecure in childhood has worked through hurt and anger.</p>	<p>PREOCCUPIED ADULT: Still embroiled with anger and hurt at parents. Unable to see own responsibility in relationships. Dreads abandonment.</p>	<p>DISMISSIVE ADULT: Dismisses importance of love and connection. Often idealizes parents but actual memories don't corroborate. Shallow self-reflection (if any).</p>
<p>Usually has securely attached child.</p>	<p>Usually has ambivalently attached child.</p>	<p>Usually has avoidantly attached child.</p>

Summary of Attachment Patterns taken from Karen, 1998, pp. 443-445



# Breastfeeding & Attachment



- ▶ Correlation between B/F & attachment.
- ▶ All breastfeeding is not equal from a psychological perspective.



# Breastfeeding & Attachment



- ▶ Babies who are breastfed **on demand** are more likely to develop secure attachment



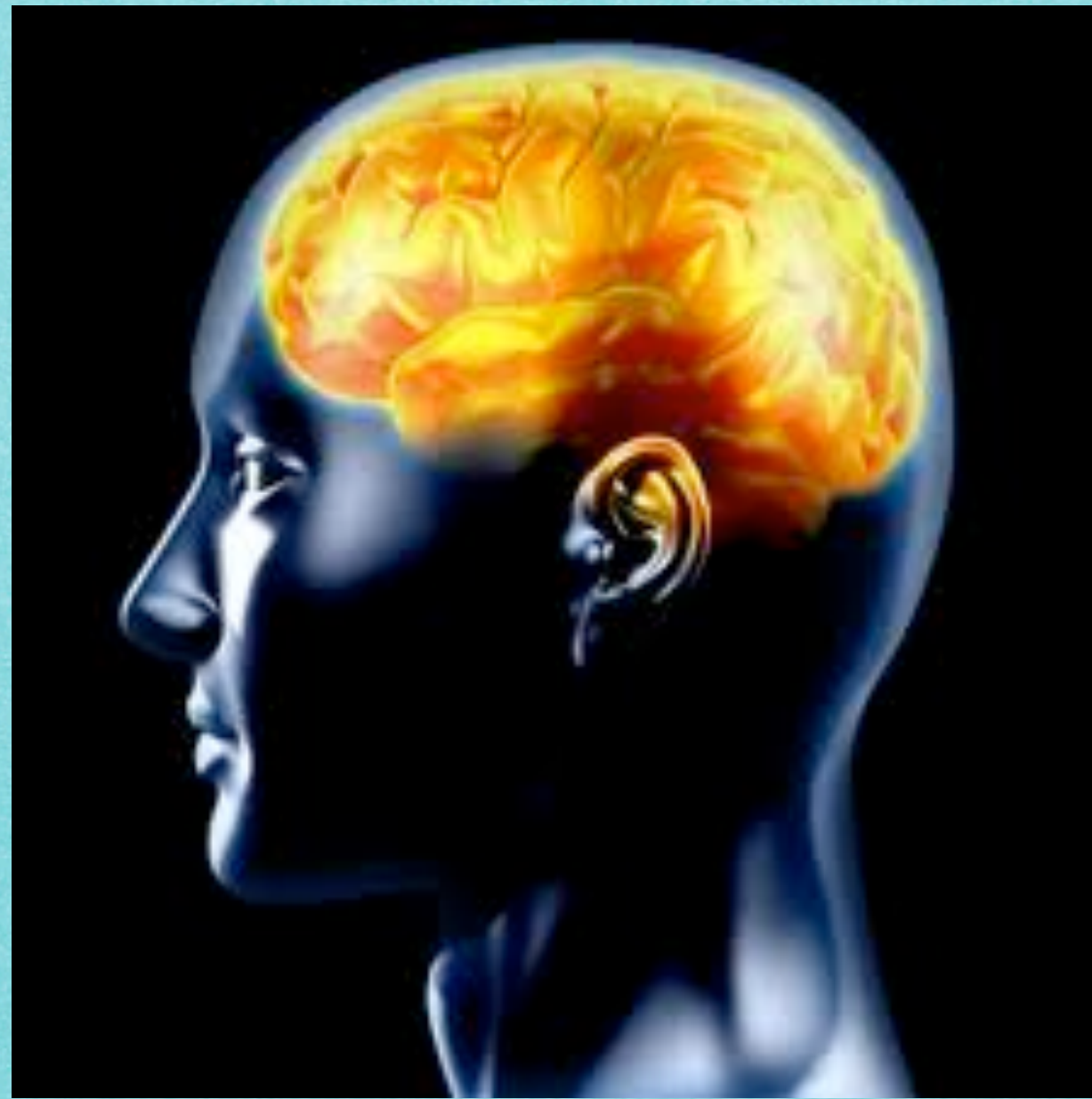
# Internalising Attachment

- ▶ Attachment relationship is internalised.
- ▶ Becomes a 'working model' of the world.
- ▶ Parenting style leads to physical changes in the brain.





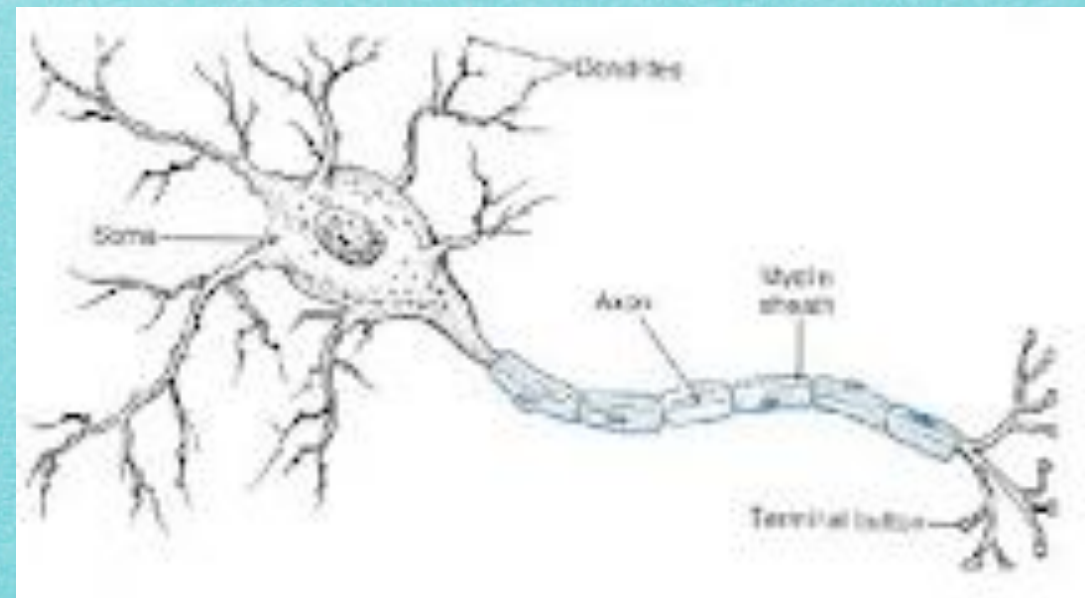
# The Human Brain





# The Human Brain

- ▶ 100 billion neurons
- ▶ 60 trillion connections
- ▶ begins developing in early pregnancy
- ▶ takes around 20 years to reach its adult form





# Brain Development

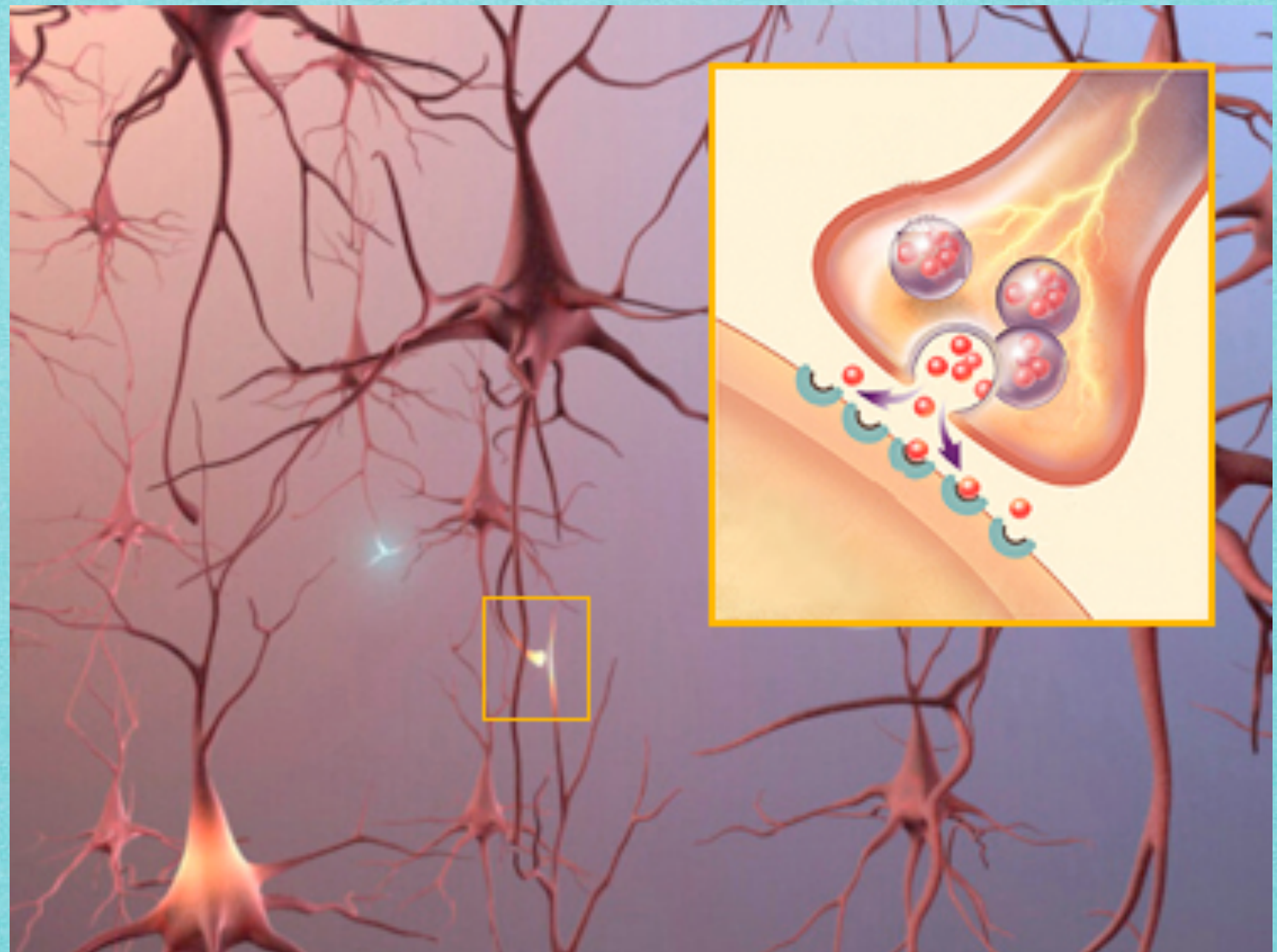


- ▶ Normal brain development involves cycles of overproduction and loss
- ▶ Adult brain has *fewer* neurons and connections than a young brain



# Neural Networks

A neural network with close-up of a synapse







**“Nature and nurture work together to shape our brains”**

(Cozolino, 2006, p. 81).





***“The brain is a social organ  
that is built through experience”***

(Cozolino, 2006, p. 7)



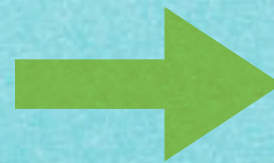


## Allan Schore & others: The Neurobiology of Attachment



# Summary

Early relationships affect the development of our brains and our capacity for psychological wellbeing





# Conclusion

- ▶ Breast really is best!
- ▶ . . . but it also matters *how* we breastfeed . . .
- ▶ because the milk isn't the most important part







# Attachment Parenting International



# Recommended Reading

- ▶ Louis Cozolino (2006). *The neuroscience of human relationships: Attachment and the Developing social brain.*
- ▶ Robert Karen (1994). *Becoming attached: First relationships and how they shape our capacity to love.*
- ▶ Margot Sunderland (2006). *The science of parenting: How today's brain research can help you raise happy, emotionally balanced children.*