

When We Are Very Young  
Episode 2  
Attachment and Society Part 2

Last time, we explored attachment: what it is, how it comes about and some of the outcomes of secure attachment in children. Most importantly, secure attachment is the best predictor of life-long health and well-being. Today, we will explore adult outcomes of a secure attachment history. We will think of the outcomes at the individual level and then I will present my thoughts on the possible outcomes at the societal and global levels.

If you haven't had the opportunity to listen to Dr. Dan Siegel's audio series, "The Neurobiology of We", I highly recommend doing so. It's only about 11 hours long, but it's worth every minute. The following section on adult outcomes of secure attachment comes from The Neurobiology of We—by Dan Siegel. There is a link to the series on my website... check it out.

In discussing adult outcomes of secure attachment, Siegel points out that these outcomes are associated with the Middle Prefrontal Cortex. This

area of the brain is more robust in people who practice meditation extensively. The outcomes are:

1. **The ability to self-regulate:** This is ability to regulate one's thoughts, emotions, behaviour and body. Adults who are able to self-regulate are able to keep their cognitive functioning strong even when upset. The upset or stress is managed well so that it does not interfere with optimal functioning. Parents who are able to self-regulate are able to remain kind, calm and mindful even when their child is having a melt-down or storm, is out of control or highly distressed. This is an important capacity because parents who are able to self-regulate would more rarely get too angry or too frightened. These parents are better able to remain sensitive and responsive to their child during the hard times. Self-regulation is also important when interacting with other adults in the workplace or in public; when conflict arises, these adults are better able to use effective strategies to manage the conflict rather than becoming emotionally and behaviourally reactive.
2. **The ability to engage in attuned communication.** This is the ability to communicate with others in a way that is wholly engaged, present, connected and empathic. This is the mind to mind, heart to heart communication that is so essential to creating secure attachment in

children. By experiencing an attuned parent, children eventually learn to communicate in a similar way. When communication is attuned, we feel heard, seen and felt. We feel respected and we feel we matter. Attuned communication forms the basis of healthy relationships.

3. **Emotional Balance** allows us to regulate our emotions and stay steady even when things are difficult and stressful.

4. **Response Flexibility** is really the opposite of being reactive.

Response Flexibility means that we make a decision about the next move we take, rather than react to the situation. Taking that moment to consider and assess, means that more likely the response will be more effective.

5. **Insight** is the ability to look inwards, to think about our internal processes and use that information effectively. It is me, observing me, thinking about my processes and using that information to inform myself.

6. **Empathy and Theory of Mind** is more or less the same as insight only it is the thinking about, feeling about what another person is feeling and thinking. Empathy often informs compassionate actions.

7. **Fear Modulation** is the ability to control one's fear. The act of controlling fear means that the higher brain, the Prefrontal Cortex is

working hard to keep the lid on the midbrain. (google Dan Siegel's Hand model of the brain)

The next two functions of the Medial Prefrontal Cortex are not associated with attachment style but are associated with the same region of the brain.

8. **Intuition** is the ability to attend to one's "gut feeling". As we humans have come to have extraordinary and highly developed brains, sometimes we are less able to access and attend to things that we "know" or sense. Animals are better at this. Intuition helps us to recognize danger or threat even if we can't say why we feel danger. Coming to more effective use of intuition means listening to the wisdom of our bodies.
9. **Morality** is, simply put, the knowing of right from wrong, not just the rules or laws.

Again, I reference Dr. Dan Siegel for this material.

Several years ago, I had the opportunity and honour to work in Afghanistan, assisting in resolving trauma and building peace skills in the children returning to school. The intersection between attachment and peace capacity became clear then and is now made explicit by Dr. Siegel's work. My theory goes like this:

It is well known that the outcome of secure attachment is the capacity for self-regulation and empathy. We can now add attuned communication, emotional balance, response flexibility, insight and fear modulation.

These intra-personal characteristics enhance the capacity for compassion and tolerating distress. When humans are compassionate, they are less likely to feel defensive, protective and closed towards other people. I think compassion allows us to say “WE”, not “us” and “them”.

This inclusiveness increases the human range of altruistic actions.

Empathy, compassion, inclusion and altruism are the basic components required for peaceful human relationships. In this way, I believe very deeply that secure attachment is vital to a peaceful future for our society and for the global community.

In Attachment and Society Part 1, it was noted that secure attachment is the best predictor of life-long health and well-being. In this episode, I have put it to you, that secure attachment at the level of global population, is a necessary precursor of peaceful human existence.

So, what are we to do?

- Let’s protect, value and enhance the parent-child relationship.

- As a society, we must educate every high school student in the field of interpersonal neurobiology and the crucial importance of parenting to create attachment security.
- We must support the mother-child relationship during gestation and prevent pre-natal trauma.
- We, as a society, need to support new parents, with education and support programs and provide them with financial security, as needed. Parents need to be able to competently parent their children and they can only do that if they have the required tools and the ability to take a long parental leave. Although Justin Trudeau's 18-month parental leave plan helps, it is insufficient. Many people will simply not be able to afford to have such a low income for 18 months. Let's get to a fully paid 18-month parental leave. Let's get to good parent programs to support those parents at home. Let's get to really high quality, low ratio child care where children have consistency in their daycare provider until school enrolment.

After all, what happens if we don't do this? We will spend more in life time health care. We will have higher costs due to crime and violence.

We will have more people living with mental health problems. We will live with fear rather than live in peace.

We have made many gains in the last couple of decades, with much gratitude to Dr. Dan Offord (A Canadian child psychiatrist, researcher, educator, innovator and advocate) and others. We still have a long way to go. Our children are our future and they need us to parent them with love, sensitivity and attunement. To me, this is the path to create peaceful, inclusive and thriving societies.

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## Reading List

1. [www.journeyofpeace.ca](http://www.journeyofpeace.ca) Website for the Peace and Trauma program in Afghanistan.
2. Dr. Daniel J. Siegel, The Neurobiology of We, Audio Series  
<http://www.soundstrue.com/store/the-neurobiology-of-we-928.html>
3. Maternity leave changes in Canada: 2017  
<http://globalnews.ca/news/3328107/federal-budget-2017-liberals-extend-parental-leave-to-18-months-boost-childcare-funding/>
4. Tribute to Dr. Dan Offord: <https://edi.offordcentre.com/about/tribute-to-dan-offord/>