CHAPTER 5

2:15 – 3:15pm

“Attachment” Perspectives in Parenting

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PowerPoint distributed at the program and also available for download in electronic format:
1. Attachment Perspectives in Parenting

Electronic format only:
1. Reference Materials

Electronic versions of these documents are available on the KCBA website: https://www.kcba.org/cle/EventDetails.aspx?Event=42913
Attachment Perspectives in Parenting
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Hot topic of debate among national experts

* AFCC – Chicago 2012 as a follow up to July 2011 Family Court Review (FCR) Special Edition on Attachment edited by Jennifer McIntosh

* In a nutshell:
  * “No overnights until the age of 3” (summary view of FCR, and experts such as McIntosh, Solomon, & George)
  * Overnights based on overall behavior and relationships, incorporating findings of developmental and social research (view of experts such as Lamb, Kelly, Warshak, Kline-Pruett)
Attachment theory: then and now

- Strict attachment theory (Bowlby and Ainsworth paradigm, see July 2011 Special Edition of *Family Court Review* 49:3)
  - Bond between two specific people
  - Principle attachment figure with hierarchical bonds
  - Later functioning can be explained by quality of attachment bond

- Current research:
  - Attachment status does not necessarily predict later functioning
  - Concept of loss (i.e. mother deprivation)
  - Multiple attachments
  - Father attachment and involvement
  - Overnights

Attachment Status Over Time

- The security of infant/child-parent attachment relationships is not fixed early in life.

- Adverse early childhood circumstances, as well as favorable circumstances, influence attachment status.

- Sensitive parenting is of particular importance to early attachment status.

- Thus, early attachment status can be a measure of warmth and supportiveness of the early relationship between parent and child – a factor courts should bear in mind.
Loss of Attachment

- “Mother deprivation” for Bowlby included brief mother-child separations, long term foster care and institutional care
- Current research: Context of loss is significant (i.e. Romanian orphanage study, working mothers study)
- Ideal situation (Kelly & Lamb 2000) for the very young: opportunities to interact with both parents every day or every other day in a variety of functional contexts.

Multiple Attachments

- Infants do better if in the care of one or a few figures but there is no evidence for the rank-ordering of attachment figures
- Infants become attached to BOTH parents at 6 to 7 months of age
  - Not a sequential order of attachment
- Two parents play complimentary roles for young children (based on the child’s moods and needs)
  - One for love and security
  - One for engaging in exciting and challenging experiences
Neurobiology: from “attachment” to “regulation”

- Attachment theory (and reciprocal connectedness) is, in essence, a regulatory theory (Schore, 2005, 2008).

- The attachment relationship facilitates the expansion of the child's coping capacities and develop the brain's self-regulatory mechanisms.
  - The reciprocal emotional interactions with the caregiver shape the organization of the right hemisphere.
  - If right brain (of parent) to right brain (of child) is not connecting (i.e. is dysregulated) then the child forms insecure attachments and has disorganized, dysregulated interactions.

Reciprocal Connectedness

- These dysregulated interactions become imprinted and lead to difficulties with self awareness, empathy, self-identification and positive identification with others.

- For a secure attachment, the infant needs access to a well-functioning adult right brain that can empathetically receive and regulate the infants emotional communications. It is not just the gender but the attachment security and emotional health of the parent that is the key to who can best provide right brain primary caregiving in the 1st year.” (Schore, 2011)
Father involvement (specifically in regards to attachment)

- Empirical studies, beginning as early as the 1960s, have consistently confirmed that infants are attached to their fathers in ways that are similar to their attachments to their mothers and that the father-child relationships can be as important as mother-child relationships in determining the future functioning of their child.

- “Despite rather impressive societally determined differences in the amounts of time that mothers and fathers spend caring for, interacting with, and being accessible to their children, infants typically become attached to both parents at about the same age (in the middle of the first year), with differences in the parents’ sensitivity influencing the quality of those attachment relationships” (Lamb, 2012).

Father attachment

- Father-child attachment is related to quantity (involvement) and quality (sensitivity) of early fathering behavior.
- Early father child attachment relationship predicts greater levels of paternal sensitivity in later childhood.

- Infants often prefer mothers for soothing; seek out fathers for play and adventure, can be soothed by dad in absence of mom.
- Preference for mothers largely disappears by 2 years if child securely attached to both parents.

Adapted from slides from Kline-Pruett & Kelly (2012)
Father attachment

- Attachment security to fathers is related to: fewer behavioral problems, greater sociability, reciprocated friendships, lower risk of internalizing and externalizing symptoms.
- When children have involved fathers, they are more likely to:
  - Be more sociable as infants;
  - Be more positive and accepting toward a second-born sibling;
  - Have a greater capacity for empathy;
  - Have better peer relationships;
  - Have fewer behavioral problems.

Adapted from slides from Kline-Pruett & Kelly (2012)

Overnights

- Little research: 4 Studies TOTAL
  - 2 studies focused on early infancy (under the age of 2)
  - 2 major studies focused on pre-school years
- Solomon & George (1999)
- McIntosh, Smyth, & Kelaher (2010) (2 studies)
- Kline-Pruett, Ebbing, & Insabella (2004)
Limitations to overnight studies

- Except for Kline-Pruett et al study, the studies:
  - Relied on mother as reporter of data, including data on fathers
  - Collected little or no data on the attachment relationships of fathers and their babies
  - Inappropriate or nonstandardized measures of attachment and separation used

Problems in Attachment Measures for use in Forensic Contexts

- Attachment measures (Strange Situation, Attachment Q Sort (AQS), Adult Attachment Interview (AAI))
- Limitations for forensic setting
  - Laboratory context
  - Mothers only
  - Training/education/certification
- Assessment at time of divorce is shaky at best...for kids and parents independently
- Without activating the attachment system (which is activated when the child is distressed) observations of parent-child dyads don't give information about attachment.
  - It tells us about parenting, but not necessarily attachment.
  - Parental warmth does not equate with secure attachment.
  - Must also look for attunement, insightfulness and scaffolding.
What does this mean for Family Law practitioners?

- Properly applied, attachment measures and approaches can help determine how a minimally verbal child and a parent relate in ways that can help the court make more informed decisions about what is best for the child in the short term.
- Attachment is just one piece of the puzzle.
- Use an updated definition of attachment based on 40+ years of research
- Look to reciprocal connectedness/attunement/sensitivity.

Conclusions

- Theory can guide legal thinking, but no theory accounts for the multiplicity of influences that are enacted in each particular situation” (Lieberman, Zeanah, & McIntosh, p. 531).
- Children need individual determinations in divorce, not generic ones based on uncertain theory.
REFERENCES


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