

“How We Connect:
The **Psychology** of
Social & Emotional
Development”



What Is Social & Emotional Development?

It refers to how people, especially children, learn to:



Understand and express emotions



Form secure relationships with others



Navigate social situations with empathy and awareness



This development begins in infancy and continues through adolescence and adulthood. It's foundational to mental health, self-esteem, and identity.

Temperament – Our Emotional Blueprint

Temperament is the inborn part of our personality. It shapes:



How intensely we feel emotions



How we respond to stress or new environments



How easily we connect with others



Types:

Easy Temperament: Adaptable, regular routines, generally positive mood

Slow-to-Warm-Up: Shy, low activity, gradually adjusts

Difficult: Irregular habits, intense reactions, struggles with change Temperament isn't fixed, but it influences early social bonding.



Attachment – The Beginnings of Love

Attachment is the emotional connection formed with primary caregivers, often in the first 18 months.

Mary Ainsworth's Strange Situation study identified 4 patterns:

1. Secure: Trusts caregiver, seeks comfort
2. Avoidant: Emotionally distant, avoids closeness
3. Ambivalent/Resistant: Clingy, anxious, hard to soothe
4. Disorganized: Fearful, confused behavior (often linked to trauma)



These attachment styles shape how we relate to others in adult life—especially in romantic and close relationships.



How Attachment Affects Life Outcomes

1. Secure attachment is linked to:

- Emotional resilience,
- Higher self-esteem,
- Better conflict resolution,
- Stronger peer and romantic relationships.



2. Insecure styles can increase risks of:

- Anxiety,
- Avoidance of intimacy,
- Difficulty trusting others.

But here's the good news—attachment can evolve through therapy, self-reflection, and healthy relationships. Growth is always possible!



School – A Social Training Ground

School introduces children to social rules beyond the family.

They learn:

- How to cooperate in groups
- How to handle disagreements
- How to share, empathize, and respect boundaries

Teachers and peers play huge roles in shaping confidence, social skills, and sense of belonging.



The Psychology of Friendship

Friendships provide:

- A space for emotional expression
- A sense of safety and support
- Practice for negotiation, loyalty, and boundaries

Early childhood: Playmates, shared interests

Middle childhood: Empathy, shared secrets, deeper trust

Adolescence: Identity exploration, emotional intimacy

Healthy friendships protect against depression, boost happiness, and promote social maturity.



Key Theories & Research You Should Know

John Bowlby:

Attachment theory—emotional bonds are biological needs

Mary Ainsworth:

The Strange Situation—revealed attachment styles



Erik Erikson:

Psychosocial stages (e.g., Trust vs. Mistrust, Industry vs. Inferiority)

Damon & Hart:

Development of self-concept & role of peer feedback

Lev Vygotsky:

Social interactions = the heart of cognitive development

When Development Faces Disruptions

When children lack safe, supportive relationships, they may struggle with:

- Insecure attachments
- Low self-worth
- Poor emotional regulation
- Social withdrawal or aggression



But with interventions (therapy, mentorship, caring adults), even disrupted development can be repaired. Emotional resilience is learnable and growth is possible.

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