

The Attachment Dance Analogy

Think of Attachment as a dance between two people. Initially, how to dance is passed on from parent to child..... or not. Let's say in the Jelle family we waltz. As the parent is teaching the child to dance, at first its going to be really awkward. Both parent and child are going to have their feet stepped on, but eventually with practice they will learn to waltz together. Think of feet as thoughts, feelings, needs, and wants.

Free Autonomous/Secure or Earned Secure Adult: The adult invites the child to dance. If the child is learning from a Free Autonomous or Earned Secure Adult, when the parent steps on the child's foot (thoughts, feelings, needs, wants), the parent will stop, acknowledge the he or she stepped on the child's foot and offer to soak it in ice, put a bandaid on it etc. in other words, make a repair as best they can. The child therefore, learns to do the same thing when he or she steps on the parent's foot. With practice, there is no fear of dancing together or fear that either partner will refuse to continue dancing with the other, because both partners know that occasionally either person's foot will get stepped on, but the hurt foot will be dealt with together and then joyful dancing will continue.

Avoidant Insecure Adult (40% general population, 80% adoptive parents): This adult also invites the child to dance and wants just was much for their child to learn to dance as the Free Autonomous parent. They too will step on each others thoughts, feelings, needs, wants. The difference is, that as they are practicing, the adult doesn't acknowledge, or dismisses the fact that a foot was stepped on and tries to keep the dance going either by being oblivious to, or by deliberately choosing to ignore the foot that needs tending. The hurt thoughts, feelings, needs, wants are unexpressed and therefore, uncared for. This child learns to dance, but suffers from from hurt feelings, thoughts, needs, wants and.... out of fear of rejection does not feel empowered to mention them. So sore feet continually go uncared for. Likewise, when he or she steps on someone else's foot, he or she has not learned when or how to repair the pain they have caused as well. There is cautious dancing together.

Ambivalent Insecure Adult: Again, this parent wants very much to dance with their child. But this parent can't lead a child to dance, because they are too rejection sensitive. They may expect the child to invite them to dance. And...they feel resentful and angry when their child is so inept at it.They too will step on each others thoughts, feelings, needs, wants. But the ambivalent parent will misinterpret their "aching foot" as disinterest or rejection by the child (i.e. you don't care about me...you did that deliberately to hurt me...etc.). The child is confused because sometimes its their own foot thats hurting and sometimes its the parent's foot, but since its always "the child's fault" somehow, the child never learns to truly distinguish between when they need to make a repair, and when they are due a repair from another person. There is resentful or dutiful dancing, but little joy.

Disorganized Adult: This parent never asks a child to dance, or disguises having your fingernails pulled out as dancing. Imagine the effort that will go into trying to engage this child to dance.