

The Influence of Parent-Child Attachment on Peer Relationships of Preschool Children

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Abstract. The preschool years represent a critical phase for children's social development. As they transition from family environments to group settings, peer interactions become vital pathways for socialization. Parent-child attachment, being the cornerstone of early emotional bonding, significantly influences children's social adaptability. Recent studies indicate that securely attached children demonstrate better emotional expression and trust-building abilities, making them more likely to establish positive peer relationships. Conversely, children with avoidant or ambivalent attachments often exhibit social withdrawal or conflict-prone behaviors. Through literature review and case analysis, this study reveals that educators should prioritize nurturing warm parent-child bonds in daily settings—such as providing daily hugs and attentive listening. Such practices not only foster healthy peer relationships but also lay a solid foundation for children's future social adaptation.

Keywords: Preschoolers; Parent-child attachment; Attachment types.

1. Introduction

Preschool time is a key period in children's social development, where their social knowledge, regulating emotions, and interacting with people develop quickly as they move from family settings into group ones. Parent-child attachment is the basis of an early emotional bond. It refers to the affectionate connection formed between caregivers and children. The attachment relationships established during early parent-child interactions transform into internal psychological representations that shape future social interaction patterns. Research indicates a significant correlation between the quality of parent-child attachment and children's social adaptability, particularly in peer relationships. Specifically, children with secure attachments typically demonstrate stronger social competence, showing willingness to cooperate with peers and actively building positive relationships. In contrast, those with avoidant or ambivalent attachments often exhibit social withdrawal. Children with avoidant attachments, fearing rejection or distrust, tend to withdraw socially, avoid initiating interactions, and struggle to integrate into peer groups. Those with ambivalent attachments may project parental conflicts onto peers, displaying excessive attention-seeking behaviors, emotional instability, and frequent clashes. However, there remains a lack of systematic research on translating these cognitive insights into concrete, actionable strategies—especially for children with diverse personality traits and family backgrounds. Therefore, this study will focus on discussing and proposing universal and targeted measures to provide practical guidance for parents to promote the development of children's peer relationships in actual education, and then provide scientific and effective corresponding countermeasures for early socialization intervention of young children.

Theoretical Value: Through continuous interactions after birth, individuals gradually establish a deep and enduring emotional bond with their parents, forming parent-child attachment 1. This study reveals the limitations of "one-size-fits-all" universal education by differentiating typical behaviors of children with different attachment types (secure, avoidant, ambivalent) in peer interactions, thereby enhancing the theoretical precision of intervention measures. 2. It provides theoretical support for home-kindergarten collaboration. The study offers clearer theoretical guidance for families and kindergartens to promote children's cooperative communication, enriches the theoretical connotation of the "home-kindergarten collaboration" concept, and drives theoretical innovation in this field.

Practical Significance: 1. The study provides scientific evidence for family education and enhances parent-child relationship quality. It reveals the importance of secure parental attachment, guiding parents to adopt effective interaction strategies such as positive responses and shared play to improve parent-child interactions. This helps establish a secure attachment relationship for children, laying the foundation for developing their peer interaction skills. 2. The research holds significant implications for teachers in identifying and intervening in children's social behaviors, enhancing educational relevance. The findings offer educators a basis for recognizing social characteristics of children with different attachment types, enabling them to develop personalized interventions. For instance, encouraging withdrawn children to participate in group activities and guiding children to adopt constructive conflict resolution methods can improve educational quality. 3. The study promotes the optimization of home-school collaboration models and resource integration. By exploring the connection between parental attachment and peer relationships, this research provides theoretical foundations and practical guidance for home-school cooperation. It assists kindergartens in disseminating scientific parenting knowledge to parents and fosters collaborative efforts between families and kindergartens in educational philosophy and strategies, collectively advancing children's social development.

2. Literature Review

Positive early family interactions are tightly related to children's social growth and have a great influence on people's development. Parent-child attachment relationship is a key predictor of children's future social adaptability; a healthy parent-child relationship is fostered by parents' warm, sensitive, and responsive parenting. According to a study, good neural synchronization made by Paternal care, co-reading time, and cooperative play all helped improve the attachment relationship [1]. With respect to children who have a low attachment security, mothers' empathic capacity is very effective when it comes to building creative capability [2], but insecure attachment has an indirect impact on regulating emotions since working memory is impacted as such [3]. Good peer friendship is very important to help young children adjust their social interaction and plays a foundational role in the socialization process of young children. Studies reveal negative correlations between shy behaviors and peer acceptance, with high self-regulation abilities exacerbating this negative impact [4]. Attachment avoidance indirectly increases loneliness through peer rejection, while peer relationships—including prosocial behaviors—significantly predict school adaptation [5]. Children's social-emotional development is influenced by self-regulation mechanisms [6].

The quality of parent-child attachment is closely related to the development of preschool children's peer relationships. Parent-child communication can improve children's self-regulation ability. Studies show that good parent-child interaction not only promotes the development of children's social ability, but also has a special protective effect on vulnerable groups such as migrant children, providing an important direction for early education intervention [7,8].

Current research predominantly focuses on the correlation between parent-child attachment and peer relationships, yet there remains a notable gap in translating these theories into practical interventions. For instance, how to develop personalized parenting strategies for children with insecure attachment styles to enhance their peer interactions, or how to adapt these approaches in multicultural contexts to ensure effectiveness—these gaps have hindered further research. This study aims to address these challenges by proposing actionable measures tailored to these specific needs.

3. The Influence of Parent-Child Attachment on Peer Communication of Preschool Children

3.1. Relevant Research Findings

3.1.1 Peer interaction characteristics of securely attached children

Secure attachment provides children with a stable emotional foundation, empowering them to explore social environments with confidence and initiative while developing strong emotional regulation skills. Children with secure attachments demonstrate greater independence during self-directed exploration [8,9]. For instance, in kindergarten free-play sessions, secure children actively try new toys and continue exploring after brief teacher guidance when encountering challenges, rather than relying entirely on adult assistance. These children often take on leadership roles in group activities, mediating peer conflicts through strategies like taking turns when distributing toys.

Compared to children with insecure attachment, infants categorized as securely attached exhibit less task-oriented emotions. This means they display fewer positive emotions during distress discussions and less negative emotions during positive discussions. Moreover, the reduction in negative emotions is more significant when transitioning from distress to positive discussions. Securely attached children demonstrate more appropriate emotional expression compared to those assessed as insecure [10].

3.1.2 Peer interaction characteristics of children with avoidant attachment

In studies exploring the correlation between childhood attachment patterns and psychological adaptation, avoidant attachment—a prevalent insecure type—has been shown to be profoundly shaped by early parent-child interaction quality. This pattern may further influence children's peer relationships and mental health. Attachment theory posits [11,12] that when caregivers consistently respond with indifference, rejection, or inconsistent responses to children's emotional needs, children gradually suppress their own attachment demands, developing an avoidant attachment style—— To escape the pain of rejection, children actively inhibit attachment behaviors (such as crying or seeking hugs) and learn emotional self-reliance. This "self-sufficient" pattern acquired in parent-child relationships is directly transferred into peer interactions. While appearing "independent," these children actually maintain emotional detachment, failing to establish deep emotional connections or trust with peers. When facing social conflicts, they lack both the ability and willingness to utilize social resources (like seeking help from friends or teachers) to resolve issues, ultimately falling into a state of isolation and helplessness.

3.1.3 Peer interaction characteristics of children with contradictory attachment

Children with ambivalent attachment often exhibit specific behavioral patterns in peer interactions, closely tied to their early attachment experiences. Bowlby's [11,12] attachment theory posits that ambivalent attachment is a byproduct of caregivers alternating between responsive and unresponsive to the child, thus creating a tension between a child's desire to explore their environment and a need for safety. Attachment styles have an influence on children's social-emotional growth in relation to friends. The main issue is their huge need for intimacy, combined with their anxiety-driven, erratic behavior, which ruins the potential for a relationship. Their 'all or nothing' attitude towards their peers' results in constant failures in real life. Therefore, they fail to create stable friendships and thus become unpredictable troublemakers in peer groups, perpetually on the verge of exclusion. This makes them feel worse about themselves and about being social. These kids' emotions are regulated in a conflicting manner with their social behaviors, so their peer relations usually become unstable, and there are frequent fights or breaks [11]. For example, their sensitivity may misinterpret others' intentions, causing unnecessary disputes or alienation.

3.2. Comparison conclusions

Psychologically, there is also stable internal security for securely attached kids. Children with an avoidant attachment, those who did not get their emotional needs met as kids, have deep-down anxiety and fear. In order to protect themselves from this pain, they suppress their real emotions. They look strong and independent on the outside, but inside, they're protecting their vulnerable self. On the contrary, it's the ambivalent ones who have problems as a result of being inconsistent and not regular.

Different behavioral performance is also very obvious. Children who have a secure attachment have good exploration behavior and are independent. Children who have an avoidant attachment and an ambivalent attachment refuse to interact with peers and do not allow friendly invitations from those around them. This negative behavior pattern is not conducive to solving practical problems and restricting their growth and development.

In conclusion, the attachment styles formed during early childhood play a crucial role in a child's development. Secure attachment supports healthy psychological, behavioral, and social growth, while avoidant or ambivalent attachment patterns may pose developmental challenges. This underscores the importance for parents and educators to recognize children's early emotional needs, creating nurturing environments that respond to their emotional cues. Such efforts help foster healthy attachment relationships, laying a solid foundation for future development.

4. Educational Strategies and Methods to Cultivate Good Peer Relationships

4.1. Optimization of Family Emotional Support

Bowlby emphasized that secure attachment forms dependence on caregivers "sensitive and stable responses," with the family serving as the core domain for children's early emotional development. 1. Establishing a consistent emotional response pattern [11]. Parents should maintain consistent responses to children's needs, avoiding contradictory behaviors like "sometimes over-attentiveness and sometimes indifference" [12]. When children express emotions, use emotional labeling techniques such as asking "You look sad because Xiao Ming isn't playing with you?" to help them recognize and accept their feelings. 2. Creating stable parent-child interaction patterns. This can be achieved through daily dedicated playtime lasting 15-30 minutes, where children lead activities while parents fully engage in role-playing games simulating social scenarios. Encourage children to practice conflict resolution skills in safe environments. Research shows that quality parent-child interactions significantly predict children's peer acceptance in kindergarten [13]. 3. Avoiding excessive intervention or emotional neglect. For avoidant children, gradually increase opportunities for emotional expression, such as setting a daily mood-sharing time. For ambivalent children, establish clear boundaries: "Mom will sit beside you when you build blocks, but I won't do it for you."

4.2. Cultivation of Social Skills in the Kindergarten Environment

Kindergartens serve as natural settings for studying peer interactions among children, effectively addressing gaps in family attachment. 1. Emotional curriculum design: Daily "Emotion Weather Report" activities allow children to express feelings through simple words or drawings. Using emotion cards helps them learn basic facial expression recognition and improve emotional interpretation skills. Hypothetical scenarios like "If... how would you feel?" cultivate perspective-taking abilities. 2. Differentiated instruction: In comparison, securely attached children can be appointed as little teachers and help children to develop leadership. Avoidant children: Initially paired up with those younger or gentler for play, with teachers actively participating in the aforementioned and leading by example to show the proper way of socializing, before eventually retreating. Use "Peer activation" by getting others to invite them to games. Ambivalent children: Try playing role-playing games and expressing emotions and social situations. Teachers share social norms and the outcomes of actions with their students using social stories. As a result, students learn appropriate boundaries and methods for interacting with people via social stories. 3. Create an inclusive classroom

environment: Teachers should stress common values that say things like “Everyone Needs Friends” and “We’re A Big Family.” Teachers can create the award of the “Cooperation Star” to promote helpful, sharing, and helping-out behaviors. When there is a conflict, help kids concentrate on solving the problem rather than pinning the blame. During social conflicts, avoid simplistic judgments or command-style instructions (e.g., “Don’t grab toys”). Instead, use question-oriented guidance like “How do you think we can share this block fairly?” to foster negotiation and self-resolution skills. Cooperative situations can be created by setting up tasks such as large jigsaw puzzles and collective building activities that require cooperation. Children with safe attachment characteristics can be arranged to act as group demonstrators or assistants, and positive interactive behaviors can be guided by the role model effect.

4.3. Parent-Home Co-education Support Strategies

Home-kindergarten collaboration serves as the cornerstone for children's social development. 1. Establishing a two-way communication mechanism. Teachers regularly report children's social behaviors in kindergarten to parents, focusing on detailed behavioral descriptions rather than general comments (e.g., “The child cooperated with peers to build a relatively complex building block structure today” instead of simply describing them as “socially adept”). Parents are encouraged to provide feedback on their children's emotional and behavioral expressions at home, supplementing teachers' observations to form a comprehensive understanding of social development. A digital platform can be utilized for continuous documentation to track the dynamic changes and progress in children's social skills. 2. Kindergartens should offer professional guidance and support. Regular parent education seminars should be organized to explain principles of children's social development and provide actionable parenting strategies. Specialized counseling services should be provided for families with unique needs (such as caregivers of avoidant or conflict-prone children). High-quality parent-child games and picture books should be recommended to help parents master practical interaction methods, thereby reducing parenting anxiety and enhancing parenting effectiveness. 3. Coordinated organization of practical social activities. Small-scale parent-child interactive events should be held in safe environments to observe and guide the quality of parent-child interactions.

Organize half-day observation activities with parents to directly understand children's real social performance in a group situation.

Organize festivals or theme activities that require parent-child collaboration, and promote the interactive practice between parents and peers in the natural context.

5. Conclusions

This study investigates the impact of parent-child attachment styles on peer relationships in preschoolers through a literature review and analysis, yielding the following conclusions: Different attachment types significantly influence children's social interaction characteristics. Securely attached children demonstrate stable emotional support, strong emotional regulation and social skills, and actively explore social interactions while resolving peer conflicts. Avoidant-attachment children, having experienced neglected emotional needs in early childhood, tend to exhibit emotional detachment and isolation in social interactions. Ambivalent-attachment children, facing inconsistent caregiver responses, experience emotional instability and frequent conflicts, making stable peer relationships challenging. The study proposes practical measures from three dimensions: family support, kindergarten education, and home-school collaboration. Families should enhance emotional support, kindergartens should cultivate social skills, and families and kindergartens need to work together. These three elements form a critical pathway for promoting children's peer relationship development, providing theoretical support and practical guidance for preschoolers' social development, thereby facilitating their successful social transition.

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