



draft

**SUMMARY OF THE SEVENTH SESSION ON 8 JANUARY 2008 IN BRUSSELS OF  
THE WORKING GROUP ON THE QUALITY OF CHILDHOOD WITHIN THE  
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT**

Seventh session: ‘Attachment, what it is, why it is important and what we can do about it to help young children acquire a secure attachment?’ with Sir Richard Bowlby from the UK.

Chairman: MEP Karin Resetarits

**THE COMMITTEE ON WOMEN’S RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY OF THE  
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ADOPTS PROPOSAL OF WORKING GROUP**

On 6 November the Working Group on the Quality of Childhood proposed to MEP Karin Resetarits to include in an Opinion of this Committee (2007/2156(INI) of 18.12.2007) the following recommendation:

35. *Recommends that the Commission reopen its ‘Childcare Network’ department in the relevant Directorate-General, to help pool best practice and rise to the demographic challenge;*

This sentence was adopted in the draft text of this group. The European Parliament should still approve it in a plenary session.

**VIEW FROM THE ALLIANCE FOR CHILDHOOD**

Mr Christopher Clouder cites an article in the New Scientist on 21 April 2007 by Helen Philips entitled Mind-Altering Media. The article investigates the effect of new media such as television and video games on the mind of children and young people. The key findings are:

- Columbia University studied long term effects of TV Viewing: ‘High levels of TV viewing may contribute to elevated risk for a type of syndrome which is often characterised by two or more of the following types of problems:
  - elevated levels of verbal and physical aggression;
  - difficulties with sleep;
  - obesity and long-term risk for obesity-related health problems from a lack of physical exercise;
  - attention and learning difficulties.
- Correlation between hours of TV Watching and aggression
- Violent Video Games have an impact on the brain
- Correlation between too many hours spent in a pre-school setting and aggression.

He furthermore cites from the book of Sue Gerhard ‘Why Love Matters: How Affection Shapes a Baby’s Brain’. The overwhelming conclusion in this book: love and affection are important for a healthy development of a child.

## ATTACHMENT, WHAT IT IS, WHY IT IS IMPORTANT AND WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT IT TO HELP YOUNG CHILDREN ACQUIRE A SECURE ATTACHMENT?

The key-note speaker Sir Richard Bowlby is the son of the well-known Dr. John Bowlby, who was the first in 1958 to publish the theory of attachment. This theory was based on his work with young children in London in the 1940's, when he observed how distressed babies and toddlers became, when their primary attachment figure, normally the mother, was separated from them. Sir Richard Bowlby himself was born in 1941. He furthered the work of his father and the subject of children's attachment and in that way he became one of the key-note speakers on attachment both in Britain and internationally. The session formulated some conclusions and follow-up actions:

- Mr Michiel Matthes remarks, that it is already an important assessment by Sir Richard, that a secure attachment of the child is the result of an adult's ability to form secure relationships.
- In this context we can draw another conclusion: It would be good when young mothers and fathers would be made sensitive about attachment by looking at videos about the behaviour of babies and how to interpret it. Research could be undertaken regarding the best way to make parents and caregivers sensitive about this topic.
- It would be good to have for all EU member states statistics about the number of toddlers that are securely attached and insecurely attached.
- Monitoring whether children are securely attached should be an integral part of the supervision of young children, for instance by the services of local government that look at present after children in a medical sense and these organisations could also give guidance in this respect. MEP Karin Resetarits: before the church gave this guidance, but the society evolves and other organisations should also take up these tasks.
- Labour market flexibility: MEP Kathy Sinnott remarks that the labour market in the USA is much more flexible than in the member states of the European Union: in the USA you can leave the work force for some time to take care of your children and get back much more easily than in Europe. In Europe we should build this type of flexibility into our labour market.
- Sir Richard Bowlby is in favour of creating a profession of daycare workers with good qualifications, good pay and good status, so that these persons can really do this work for many years.

### FOLLOW-UP ACTION LIST OF THE SESSION OF 20 SEPTEMBER 2007.

In the session of 20 September John Bennett makes the following remark with regards to the Netherlands: 'During the past five years the daycare sector was privatized, whereby some welfare standards have been kept, but pedagogical rules were cancelled, thus lowering the quality of these services for children'.

In the Action List of 20 September 2007 Mr. Michiel Matthes stated that he would follow-up on this remark.

He found an early childhood expert in the Netherlands, Mrs Anke van Keulen, partner in the DECET Network, with whom he discussed the statement of Mr John Bennett and her reaction is as follows:

Within DECET (a European early childhood network) in general it is assumed that when daycare centres are being privatized this implies a lowering of the standards of the services in question. According to Mrs Anke van Keulen this connection is not fully true in the Netherlands. The pedagogical level is reasonable and the sector works on a further improvement and on pedagogical standards.



## REPORT OF THE SEVENTH SESSION ON 8 JANUARY 2008 IN BRUSSELS OF THE WORKING GROUP ON THE QUALITY OF CHILDHOOD WITHIN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Seventh session: **‘Attachment, what it is, why it is important and what we can do about it to help young children acquire a secure attachment?’** with Sir Richard Bowlby from the UK.

### 1. OPENING

MEP Karin Resetarits welcomes the participants and opens the session. She recalls that the input given by the Working Group to Mrs Resetarits on 6 November 2007 regarding the EP Working Group on Demography was adopted in the draft version of a proposal, to be submitted to a plenary session of the Parliament. The sentence that was adopted reads as follows:

*The Working Group on Demography of the European Parliament recommends to the European Commission to re-establish the Childcare Network.*

### 2. VIEW FROM THE ALLIANCE FOR CHILDHOOD

Mr Christopher Clouder, Director of the Alliance For Childhood European Network Group, starts his presentation with the statement that he, contrary to Sir Richard Bowlby, will not speak about attachment, but instead about detachment with reference to an article in the New Scientist on 21 April 2007 by Helen Philips entitled Mind-Altering Media. The article investigates the effect of new media such as television and video games on the mind of children and young people. It was more difficult to assess the impact of internet, because its use is much more diverse and therefore direct correlations can hardly be appraised.

*Columbia University studied long term effects of TV Viewing:*

Mr. Clouder cites from the article: ‘When it comes to TV, however, there is no getting away from the fact that the bad news outweighs the good. One of the biggest studies was done by Jeffrey Johnson and colleagues at Columbia University in New York, who followed more than 700 families for 17 years, recording their viewing habits, health, backgrounds and various behavioural tendencies. Their findings confirm those of previous, smaller studies showing that the amount of TV watched during childhood and teens correlates with changes in attention and sleep patterns, among other things. The groups latest analysis will be published next month, so Johnson can’t reveal details yet, but he says: ‘High levels of TV viewing may contribute to elevated risk for a type of syndrome which is often characterised by two or more of the following types of problems:

- elevated levels of verbal and physical aggression;
- difficulties with sleep;
- obesity and long-term risk for obesity-related health problems from a lack of physical exercise;
- attention and learning difficulties.

*Correlation between hours of TV Watching and aggression*

Christopher Clouder continues by stating that even if one takes into account factors like family background, previous neglect, neighbourhood and lack of education there still is a correlation between the amount of watching television and the likelihood of behaving aggressively towards others. He quotes: 'The findings show that television seems to raise aggression levels over time too. Young adults who had watched more than 3 hours of TV per day at age 14 committed five times as many aggressive acts, from threatening behaviour to actual physical assault. It has been found that 3 hours of watching TV per day by children increases with a factor 5 the likelihood of committing aggressive acts towards others by those children, in comparison with children that only watch one hour of TV per day'.

*Violent Video Games have an impact on the brain*

With regard to video games Mr Clouder cites the following statement: 'Another study found that frontal lobe activity was reduced in youngsters who played a violent video game for 30 minutes, compared with those playing an equally exciting but non-violent game. This brain region is important for concentration and impulse control, among other things. A region called the amygdala, important for emotional control, was more aroused in those who experienced the violent game'.

*Correlation between too many hours spent in a pre-school setting and aggression*

Mr Clouder remarks that the press is nowadays picking up these kinds of technological stories. We, as advocates for children, should take this serious. The above mentioned article mainly speaks about children in their early teens, but, says Mr Clouder, very young children are also affected by these technological developments. A study in the USA among 3500 five years old children in 282 kindergartens during 30 years shows that they are more aggressive when they stay for too many hours in a pre-school setting. If these more aggressive children get together with children, that did not have so many hours in pre-school, the aggressive behaviour rubs off to the others.

*Sue Gerhardt: love and affection are important for a healthy development of a child*

As third point Mr Clouder recommends a book entitled 'Why Love Matters: How Affection Shapes a Baby's Brain' by Sue Gerhardt. In this book Sue Gerhardt translates the latest neurological and brain science findings into a book that is attractive for the general public. In her book she explains in a convincing way the importance of love and affection for the healthy development of a baby and young child. She informs the reader that babies and young children develop an emotionally avoidant style of relating when it experiences negative attitudes. This reaction pattern becomes part of the psychological structure of the person and later in life it is difficult for these persons not to react aggressively and emotionally avoidant when faced with difficulties.

**3. ATTACHMENT, WHAT IT IS, WHY IT IS IMPORTANT AND WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT IT TO HELP YOUNG CHILDREN ACQUIRE A SECURE ATTACHMENT?**

Sir Richard Bowlby is the son of the well-known Dr. John Bowlby, who was the first in 1958 to publish the theory of attachment. This theory was based on his work with young children in London in the 1940's, when he observed how distressed babies and toddlers became, when their primary attachment figure, normally the mother, was separated from them. Sir Richard Bowlby was born in 1941 and became a scientific photographer. Alongside this he furthered the work of his father and the subject of children's attachment and in that way he became one of the key-note speakers on attachment both in Britain and internationally.

### **What Is Attachment Theory?**

Sir Richard: 'Before talking about attachment theory, I need to tell you what attachment is. My father used the term "attachment" to describe the affectional bonds that develop between babies and their mothers. Most people call these family bonds "love" - the sort of family love that's different from sexual love'.

#### *Based on empirical research*

Attachment theory is based on findings from empirical research, from observational studies and from clinical examples; it's a framework for understanding the nature of the enduring family bonds that develop between children and their parents - their attachment figures. The theory focuses mainly on relationships during early childhood, and the impact that these have on the emotional development and mental health of children as they grow up. Sir Richards asks the rhetorical question: is the mental health of child at present better than 50 years ago? Many psychologists respond with 'no'.

#### *In times of danger babies and toddlers seek their mother/ primary attachment figure*

Babies and toddlers have a powerful survival reaction to sense danger whenever they are in unfamiliar places and have no access to an attachment figure, preferably to their primary attachment figure (who is usually but not necessarily their biological mother). This sense of danger frightens children and triggers their attachment seeking response, and this response will be terminated only when they reach proximity to their attachment figure. Attachment seeking is a specific response requiring a specific termination - proximity to an attachment figure. Similar behaviours (usually called imprinting) can be observed in the young of many other species and it's a very successful survival strategy. To illustrate this point Sir Richard shows a video with a herd of elephants who protect a newly born baby elephant against a group of lions: the lions have not a chance....., showing 50 million years of elephant evolution.

#### *Attachment response: when it starts and when it peaks*

The attachment response starts at about 6 months, peaks between 12 and 24 months, and by 36 months the intensity has reduced sufficiently that most children can tolerate a few hours separation from attachment figures without distress - during pre-school nursery for example.

#### *The quality of this enduring mother/child bond will have a significant impact on the child's developing personality and future social, emotional and mental wellbeing*

By their fifth birthday most children can manage five short days of school. Attachment theory concentrates mainly on the bond that a mother has for her child, and on the attachment that a child has with their mother or the person who raises them. The quality and nature of this enduring mother/child bond will have a significant impact on the child's developing personality and future social, emotional and mental wellbeing - for better or for worse.

#### *The quality of the attachment has a very significant influence on how they make future relationships*

A child's primary attachment figure is usually the biological mother, but the biological link is not essential. In many cases someone else raises the child and becomes the primary attachment figure - such as when a child has been adopted or raised by the father or grandmother. A baby sometimes becomes primarily attached to a temporary carer, a nanny for example, instead of to their own mother, and the child experiences a traumatic loss if the nanny leaves and the primary attachment bond is broken. But most people have an enduring

attachment bond with their mother that lasts a lifetime, and the quality of this relationship has a very significant influence on how they make future relationships.

*The development of babies' primary attachment bond can be compared to the development of speech.*

Human babies have a natural propensity to talk, but they need to have the experience of hearing speech in order to acquire the words, and learn to speak the language of the adult. Similarly, babies have a natural propensity to become attached, but they need to have regular interactions with a consistent adult in order to develop an attachment relationship with them, and the quality of the relationship will depend on the adult's capacity for making secure or insecure attachments.

*Secondary attachment figures can promote self-esteem in children*

In appropriate circumstance and given sufficient time and attention, children can develop enduring secondary attachment bonds to affectionate and responsive people such as grandmothers, nannies, aunts, neighbours or child-minders (day-mothers). Three or more secondary attachment figures in addition to a primary attachment figure can promote self-esteem in children, and is a psychological protective factor that can reduce the probability of mental health problems in the future. Being part of a big family is a protective factor. An isolated mother, alone with a child, is a risk factor.

### **Why is attachment theory important?**

Attachment theory has helped researchers to identify the causal links between people's childhood experiences of adverse attachment relationships, and their subsequent social, emotional and mental health problems. Understanding the nature and effects of childhood attachments has been extremely valuable to health care professionals who try to promote good parenting practice and to support disadvantaged families.

*It assists therapists to help people and it helps policy makers to promote good parenting practices*

Attachment theory has been especially valuable to professionals trying to treat people who have suffered from the negative effects of dysfunctional or broken attachments in childhood, and who as adults are struggling with emotional or mental health problems. Attachment theory is beginning to have an influence in various spheres:

- the law in child custody cases;
- the decision by the UK government to provide longer, paid, maternity leave;
- the introduction of legislation requiring babies and toddlers in day-care to be cared for by a secondary attachment figure, or a "key-person" as they are called. Sir Richard remarks that it is even written down in the law in Britain that anybody caring for a baby must love the child and build up a genuine bond with the child and its parents. He adds that it may be difficult to implement this, perhaps undeliverable, but the law text is as it is.

*A secure attachment is an advantage for a whole life time*

Most children develop relationships with their parents that make them feel safe and give them a sense of security and confidence. Such children will have a subconscious psychological model of their parents as being available and loving, and a complementary model of themselves as being worthy of their parent's support and love. This positive expectation of relationships is part of "secure attachment" and is an advantage to children and a protective factor. Not all relationships are the same. Some less positive attachment relationships are

classified as insecure, and this sort of relationship can be a disadvantage to children and a risk factor that contributes to future mental health problems.

*Attachment is a characteristic of the relationship*

A child can form a secure attachment to one parent, and an insecure attachment to the other parent. Attachment is not a characteristic of either the child or the parent, it is a characteristic of the relationship. The parent's sensitivity to the needs of the child is a major determinant in whether a secure or insecure attachment will develop. It has been found that the parent's ability to provide a secure attachment will be heavily influenced by the quality of care that they received during the first two or three years of their own life.

*The nature of the attachment bond is passed on to the next generation*

There is an inter-generational transmission of attachment styles. If the care that the parents received when they were children was sensitive and well balanced and provided them with a secure attachment, they are likely to provide similar parenting for their own children. If the care the parents received was insensitive and unbalanced and provided them with an insecure attachment, they also are likely to provide similar parenting for their children.

In both the first and second case, the style of attachment is repeated with their own children because it feels familiar to the parent, but in the second case the parents either justify their parenting behaviour as "it never did me any harm", or they may over-react and try to provide the complete reverse of their own experience, but they provide equally unbalanced and insensitive care, and again an insecure attachment will develop. For example, if the parent was abused or neglected as a child, they may over-protect their own child and restrict play and exploration - providing unbalanced and insensitive care.

*There is a tendency for the quality of early attachments to continue into adulthood*

In the absence of any significant life-changing events, there is a tendency for the quality of early attachments to continue into adulthood, and this can have an influence on future relationships. Some positive experiences in life, such as psychotherapy or meeting a secure partner, can alter a person's expectation of how relationships develop, and their model for making relationships can become more secure. But someone's model of relationship can become less secure if they have a negative experience such as untimely separation from or loss of an attachment figure.

*Attachment bonds are extremely powerful and can yield great benefits or the inverse*

Throughout life, attachment bonds are extremely powerful, and like any powerful system the benefits can be very great when the system is optimal, well balanced and working smoothly, but very painful if the system is sub-optimal, out of balance or broken. Attachment theory has highlighted the social and emotional consequences of a range of problems associated with the making and breaking of attachment bonds.

**How can we achieve secure attachments?**

It takes babies several months to develop an attachment to an adult, yet an adult can form a bond to a baby very quickly - sometimes even before it's born - but most parents develop a bond gradually during the first few weeks. Although the great majority of mothers love their babies, some parents have a problem that prevents them bonding with their baby at all, and the baby is then very unlikely to be able to form a secure attachment to them. 35 - 40% of babies develop an insecure attachment to their mothers. The insecurity of these relationships means that babies are anxious about their mother's ability to comfort them emotionally.

Important concepts we need to understand about attachment:

- how babies develop a primary attachment.
- how babies develop a secure attachment.
- how to maintain secure attachment.
- how to avoid harming a secure attachment.
- how to change from insecure to secure attachment.

*Virtually every culture throughout the world strives for a stable family life*

Virtually every culture throughout the world strives for a stable family life, but rapid change in Western lifestyle over the past two generations has led to many cultural values being abandoned - they seem old fashioned and inconvenient to many of us. One recent change is that many extended families have become fragmented into several “nuclear families”, and this has had a profound impact on family life and child rearing practices. We may find it helpful to have a more cognitive understanding of how these family bonds develop, so we can make better informed choices about work / life balance and the care of our young children.

Raising securely attached children is very demanding on parents. Sensitive attunement (the cornerstone of secure attachment) takes a great deal of parents’ time and attention. Knowing the personality and understanding the individual communications of a baby is very difficult if parents don’t have sufficient time, and even more difficult for working single parents raising children on their own

*How do Babies Develop a Primary Attachment?*

From birth, babies are learning to recognise different people and are developing their mental capacity to form attachments. By about 6 months most babies are beginning to show a preference for one person, and by about 9 months their primary attachment bond to this person - usually the birth mother - is well advanced, and by about 12 to 14 months the primary attachment is usually well established. At the same time the baby’s ability to differentiate between familiar people they know and unfamiliar strangers they don’t recognise will have developed.

There are many features of care that influence babies’ choice of who becomes their primary attachment figure, but the two main ones are:

- being comforted when they cry,
- being played with.

These two experiences help babies select the one person who most frequently and predictably brings them both comfort and joy, and that person becomes the baby’s primary attachment figure. In the English language there is a saying which illustrates the above:

*Families that play together stay together.*

*How do Babies Develop a Secure Primary Attachment? Crying - resolving negative feelings*

A secure attachment is likely to develop when an adult is sensitive and attuned to the baby’s communications, and when the adult provides consistent and predictable care which meets the needs of the baby quickly and reliably.

An insecure attachment is likely to develop when the adult is insensitive and not well attuned to the baby’s communications, and when the care is inconsistent and unpredictable and does not satisfy the baby’s needs quickly or reliably.

*Playing - providing positive feelings.*

A secure attachment is likely to develop when an adult engages sensitively in playful interactive games that hold the baby’s attention and bring them joy. The adult’s play needs to

be appropriate to the baby's capacity to enjoy the game, and the adult must be sufficiently attuned to know when to start, stop, repair or re-engage with the baby.

An insecure attachment is likely to develop when the adult is not sufficiently sensitive when playing interactive games and does not engage with the baby or bring them joy. The activities may be beyond the baby's capacity for excitement, or the adult may be careless, neglectful or intrusive and misjudge the baby's abilities or mood, and not know when to start, stop, repair or re-engage with the baby.

NOTE. At the same time that babies are developing their primary attachment (either secure or insecure), they are usually developing secondary attachments to other familiar people. These secondary attachments can be either secure or insecure depending again on the adult's ability to relate, so a baby can develop a secure attachment to one adult and an insecure attachment to another adult.

#### *How to maintain secure attachment?*

One of the most important and complex tasks for parents of securely attached children is to maintain boundaries that are realistic and appropriate to the child's developing competence and within the parents resources. Considerable time and attention is required to maintain these limits for children who have grown to expect supportive and sensitive care and are eager to explore and learn about their environment. The challenge for parents is to find a balance between restraint and safety on one hand, and encouragement for new and challenging experiences on the other.

An important research finding is that the most socially adept young men and women had mothers who had provided an enduring secure base throughout their childhood, and also had fathers who were sensitive when playing challenging and exciting interactive games. Young adults who had been provided with a secure base and exciting activities by parents who expressed satisfaction with their partner relationship, had the highest social skills at age 22 years.

Maintaining a secure attachment to the primary attachment figure during childhood promotes stable intimate relationships in adulthood, and having exciting and challenging activities promotes social competencies at school and in young adulthood.

#### *How to Avoid Harming a Baby's and a Child's Attachment*

The key to maintaining secure attachments throughout childhood is to avoid any experience, however well intentioned, that overwhelms the attachment bond. Maintaining children's security of attachment requires that their attachment figure provides them with a sense of safety and protection at all times. Children who are frightened, whether by parents who are abusive, neglectful or violent, or by being separated from their attachment figures for an inappropriate amount of time (even when they're in perfectly "safe" situations) can become insecurely attached.

Extreme experiences of separation that are known to harm young children are spending weeks or months in residential care or, as used to happen in the UK in the 1950's, spending two weeks in hospital with only brief visits from an attachment figure. An experience which seems safe to adults but not to babies, is spending each day without access to an attachment figure in certain forms of non-parental daycare. The circumstances in which babies cannot access a secondary attachment figure are found most frequently in group child-care settings such as day-nurseries.

I believe that many babies and toddlers develop a risk factor in daycare without an attachment figure, and babies from disadvantaged families where insecure attachment is common are particularly vulnerable. Babies with an insecure attachment at home, who then spend time in

daycare without an attachment figure, will have their negative model of relationships reinforced.

These babies need daycare from a long-term secondary attachment figure who is consistent throughout the years of daycare, is sensitive to their individual needs, and is always available to them. In this way a more positive model of relationships can develop. Although we know that this is what babies need, it seems to be extremely difficult to provide this in group daycare settings.

#### *Sir Richard criticises the British Boarding School System*

Sir Richard criticises in this context the British habit of sending 6 year old children to boarding school. They are not ready for it: it is overwhelming and harmful for them. Secure attachment is attained when the attachment figures provide the child with a sense of safety and protection at all times. It is typically the mother that provides the emotional security and the father that provides the physical security. In this context Sir Richard mentions that this message is not easy listening, because today in the UK 50% of co-habiting couples (40% of all couples) split up before the child is 5 years old.

#### *How to change from insecure to secure attachment.*

Attachment theory is concerned with the quality of the relationships that babies and toddlers develop with their primary attachment figures. Although the security of the babies' attachment may be influenced by their temperament, the greatest influence will come from the adult's ability to form secure relationships. Therefore changing the adult's ability to relate to the baby is going to be the focus of early intervention programmes.

To my knowledge, no one has found a "magic bullet" for instantly switching insecure attachment into secure attachment. The most common origin of children's insecure attachment is the intergenerational transmission of insecure relationships. Most of the effective interventions (such as attachment based family psychotherapy) aim to resolve old attachment issues from previous generations.

Changing from insecure to secure attachment is slow, expensive and takes very skilful therapists, and the cure is never complete - at times of stress, "ghosts from the nursery" return to haunt people. Prevention is infinitely preferable to cure.

## 4. DISCUSSION

#### *Neuroscientists discover the impact of a good early childhood environment on the brain*

The neuroscientists are discovering at present, that they cannot explain the rapid neurological developments in the brain of a child without reference to the interaction between the baby and his/her environment. This discovery was triggered by the research regarding the Romanian orphans from the Ceausescu regime, which were intensely studied. These orphans had been severely deprived from interactions with a primary caregiver. It turned out that certain parts of their brains were inexistent (black holes on the brain scans). It furthermore turned out that the harm was least for those children who had endured this for a shorter period. Regarding this research the name of professor Mike Rutter is mentioned.

#### *Cortisone level in the blood of a toddler*

When toddlers are in a daycare centre the cortisone level in their blood gets higher. When the primary attachment figure fetches the child at the end of the day normally the cortisone level drops. However some primary attachment figures do not succeed in comforting the child sufficiently and the cortisone level remains elevated throughout the night. Sir Richard remarks that he is not aware of studies regarding the long term effects of prolonged high

cortisone levels in the blood of a toddler. He thinks that it will not be beneficial for the child, but this needs to be researched.

*MEP Karin Resetarits:*

Women give birth to less children than they would like because consciously and / or unconsciously they are aware that they cannot give these unborn children all the care they would like to give. Sir Richard confirms this statement. Next Mrs Resetarits remarks that in developing countries mothers give birth to many more children, but the possibilities for raising them are often much more difficult.

*Good behaviour of toddlers can disguise that a child has shut down*

Sir Richard Bowlby: Children in many daycare centres seem to be happy. From the outside they seem to be children that behave well and do what the daycare workers tell them. The parents are happy: they don't have complaints, neither about their children nor about the daycare centre. But the situation only seems to be good. However, when we have a deeper look we can see that some children have shut down and are withdrawn in themselves, and we should be aware of this phenomenon.

*The age that a young child is ready to leave the home: 33 months*

Mrs Geseke Lundgren then remarks, that we as societies cannot go back to a situation where young children stay at home until they go to kindergarten. In this context she asks if Sir Richard is aware of research regarding the age the child is ready to go to daycare and kindergarten. Sir Richard replies, that he is only aware of the research of Maria Montessori in the 1930's in Italy, who had found that children were ready to go to pre-school nursery at the age of 2 years and 9 months. Sir Richard adds that present day brain research indicates that at this age the right brain is ready for emotional and intuitive activity and the left brain enables the child to speak with three words and it can remember the past (for instance: mum will come back).

*Parental Leave three years*

MEP Karin Resetarits reacts: if we look at the above we could conclude that parental leave should be three years. In this context my question: could this parental leave be shared between the mother and the father from the point of view of the child? The reply of Sir Richard is, that he thinks that the mother is more equipped for the role of the primary attachment figure during the first three years, but roles can be switched.

Conclusion: both the mother and the father will benefit from extra guidance regarding their role in this respect.

*MEP Kathy Sinnott:*

When we look at this situation it becomes clear that developments in society will force us to go back (or forward) to a situation whereby the child receives again during the first phase of his/her life care of a good quality. Also this may be an inconvenient truth, but we have to face it.

*Mrs Geseke Lundgren:*

I am faced in Sweden with young parents who question their own ability to attach to their own children. How to address this question? Has it to do with their own childhood in the 1980's and 1990's, when the parental leave of their parents was shortened to 18 months? Sir Richard replies, that a thing like this cannot be proved.

*Some general conclusions and follow-up actions:*

- Mr Michiel Matthes remarks, that it is already an important assessment by Sir Richard, that a secure attachment of the child is the result of an adult's ability to form secure relationships.
- In this context we can draw another conclusion: It would be good when young mothers and fathers would be made sensitive about attachment by looking at videos about the behaviour of babies and how to interpret it. Research could be undertaken regarding the best way to make parents and caregivers sensitive about this topic.
- It would be good to have for all EU member states statistics about the number of toddlers that are securely attached and insecurely attached.
- Monitoring whether children are securely attached should be an integral part of the supervision of young children, for instance by the services of local government that look at present after children in a medical sense and these organisations could also give guidance in this respect. MEP Karin Resetarits: before the church gave this guidance, but the society evolves and other organisations should also take up these tasks.
- Labour market flexibility: MEP Kathy Sinnott remarks that the labour market in the USA is much more flexible than in the member states of the European Union: in the USA you can leave the work force for some time to take care of your children and get back much more easily than in Europe. In Europe we should build this flexibility into our labour market.
- Sir Richard is in favour of creating a profession of daycare workers with good qualifications, good pay and good status, so that these persons can really do this work for many years.

5. FOLLOW-UP ACTION LIST OF THE SESSION OF 20 SEPTEMBER 2007.

On 20 September Mr John Bennett was the key note speaker in the session of the Working Group on the Quality of Childhood with the title 'How can we improve in the European Union the Early Childhood Educational Systems?' In this session Mr John Bennett made the following remark:

*With regards to the Netherlands John Bennett makes the following remark:  
During the past five years the daycare sector was privatized, whereby some welfare standards have been kept, but pedagogical rules were cancelled, thus lowering the quality of these services for children.*

In the Action List of 20 September 2007 Mr. Michiel Matthes stated that he would follow-up on this remark.

Action taken:

Via Mr John Bennett Mr Michiel Matthes was introduced to the DECET Network Group, which held from 18 until 20 October 2007 in Brussels a conference about 'Foundations for Equal Opportunities for All in Early Childhood Care and Education'. Mr Michiel Matthes participated in this conference. The coordinator of DECET and of the conference was Mrs Anke van Keulen, the Dutch member of this network group.

**Remarks by Mrs. Anke van Keulen about the statement of Mr John Bennett:**

Within DECET in general it is assumed that when Daycare Centres are being privatized this implies a lowering of the standards of the services in question. According to Anke van Keulen this connection is not fully true in the Netherlands. The pedagogical level is reasonable. Meanwhile a tremendous move of upscaling has taken place with some large daycare

organisations, which run up to 100 local daycare centres. There is a central staff which manages these centres. For the sector the following rules apply:

- There is a national labour contract for the employees in the sector;
- The employees need to have a professional qualification before they can work in a daycare centre;
- The local government (GGD) checks the physical environment, the material and hygienic situation of each daycare centre;
- There are norms for the sizes of the group and the size of the rooms.
- The big daycare organisations intend to focus more on their social responsibility management style and try to improve continuously their organisation. MUTANT is often training the staff of these organisations.

However there are also organisations to focus primarily on commercial goals.

The Association of Local Government (VNG), which also participated in the DECET conference, organised recently a conference for the Dutch local governments. The title: Equal Opportunities and Social Integration in the local communities. John Bennett was one of the key-note speakers and at this occasion he was briefed about the current situation in the Netherlands and in this way he could update his grasp of the Dutch situation.

#### **Anke van Keulen's comments about the current Early Childhood situation in the Netherlands:**

- At the local level there is still insufficient coordination between the elderman responsible for early childhood systems and the daycare organisations, but attuning and cooperation are growing.
- A group of pedagogues are working on standards / guidelines for the daycare centres for the age category of 0 to 4. Dr Elly Singer (University Utrecht / Amsterdam), an international known expert in Early Childhood, participates in this. She is also one of the authors of the book 'Kijken, kijken, kijken, over samenspelen, botsen en verzoenen bij jonge kinderen' (Translated in: 'The social lives of young children. Play, conflict and moral learning in day-care groups. Amsterdam: SWP, 2006/2007').

Report written by Mr Michiel Matthes, Secretary-General of the Alliance for Childhood European Network Group.

**Annex 1****PARTICIPANTS OF THE SESSION OF THE WORKING GROUP ON THE QUALITY OF CHILDHOOD ON 8 JANUARY 2008**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Function</b>	<b>E-mail Address</b>
Mrs Karin Resetarits	MEP	kresetarits@europarl.eu.int
Mr Michiel Matthes	Secretary of Working Group	michiel.matthes@scarlet.be
Mrs Ena Tomaszewska	MEP	ewa.tomaszewska@europarl.europa.eu
Mrs Kathy Sinnott	MEP	ksinnott@europarl.eu.int
Mrs. Christopher Clouder	Director European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education	cclouder@dsl.pipex.com
Mrs Geseke Lundgren	IASWECE	geseke.lundgren@telia.com
Mrs Martina Leibovici	ARGE-Erziehungsberatung	martina.leibovici@fitforkids.at
Mrs Michéla Pfeifer	Assistant of Mrs Resetarits	kresetarits-assistant@europarl.eu.int
Mrs Alexia Maniaki-Griva	Assitant of Mrs Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou	mpanayotopoulos-assistant@europarl.eu.int
Mrs Joanna Snelle	Assistant of Mrs Sinnott	ksinnott@europarl.eu.int

**Annex 2****BOOKS MENTIONED BY VARIOUS SPEAKERS**

Mind-altering Media by Helen Phillips, New Scientist, 7 April 2007.  
 Why love matters by Sue Gerhard



INVITATION FOR ALL WHO ARE INTERESTED IN THE WORLD OF OUR  
CHILDREN

hosted by  
**MEP Karin Resetarits, chair person**

**Working Group on the Quality of Childhood within the European Parliament.**

Seventh session: ‘Attachment, what it is, why it is important and what we can do about it to help young children acquire a secure attachment?’ with Sir Richard Bowlby from the UK.

Time: Tuesday, 8 January 2008 from 13.00 until 15.00 hours

Location: European Parliament, Rue Wiertzstraat 60, Brussels, Entrance Spinelli, Room ASP 5G 375.

This program was developed in cooperation with the Alliance for Childhood European Network Group, whose members are:

ARGE-Erziehungsberatung, Austria  
The Linkedness Project, Belgium  
Project Experiential Education, Belgium  
The Kempler Institute, Denmark  
Legambiente, Italy  
Universal Education Foundation (NL)  
Korczak Foundation, The Netherlands  
Center for Youth and Development, The Hague  
University for Professional Education, The Hague  
Roosevelt Academy, Middelburg (NL)  
Verein mit Kindern Wachsen, Germany

Marina Leibovici-Mühlberger  
Gie Deboutte  
Ludo Heylen  
Claes Solberg Pedersen  
Vittoria Cogliati Dezza  
Marijke Sluijter  
Theo Cappon

University of Cordoba, Spain

René Diekstra  
Lienhard Valentin  
Sabine Heggemann  
Rosario Ortega Ruiz  
Rosario Del Rey

International Association for Steiner / Waldorf  
Early Childhood Education (Sweden)

Geseke Lundren  
Oliver Langscheid (Germany)

European Council for Steiner  
Waldorf Education, Brussels  
Secretariat, Brussels

Christopher Clouder  
Michiel Matthes

Boris Cyrulnik of the Université de Toulon, France has expressed his interest in gradually getting involved with the Alliance for Childhood European Network Group.

### **Sir Richard Bowlby**

Sir Richard Bowlby is the son of the famous Dr. John Bowlby, who was the first in 1958 to publish the theory of attachment. This theory was based on his work with young children during the war in London in 1940, when he observed how distressed babies and toddlers became, when their primary attachment figure, normally the mother, was separated from them. Sir Richard Bowlby was born in 1941 and became a scientific photographer. Alongside this he furthered the work of his father and the subject of children's attachment and in that way he became one of the key-note speakers on attachment both in Britain and internationally.

### **What is a secure attachment?**

Secure attachments are thought to occur when children have consistent, emotionally attuned, contingent communication with their parent or other primary caregiver. Relationships that provide contingency, especially at times of emotional need, offer children repeated experiences of feeling connected, understood, and protected.

One way to understand how attachment is created through communication is by looking at what we call the ABC's of the attachment process: attunement, balance, and coherence.

When a parent's initial response is to be attuned to his child, the child feels understood and connected to the parent. Attuned communications give the child the ability to achieve an internal sense of balance and supports her in regulating her bodily states and later her emotions and states of mind with flexibility and equilibrium. These experiences of attuned connections and the balance they facilitate enable the child to achieve a sense of coherence within her own mind (the text of this invitation is partly taken from D.J. Siegel and M. Hartzell, *Parenting from the Inside Out*, pages 103 and following).

### **What happens when children do not have a secure attachment?**

- The child can become avoidantly attached, meaning that the child adapts by avoiding closeness and emotional connection to the parent;
- The child may become ambivalently attached when the child cannot rely upon the parent for attunement and connection;
- The child will internalize in the brain these types of relationships and it may become the model for relationship the child will develop with other persons later in life.
- Insecure attachment is acknowledged as a risk factor that often contributes to mental health problems of children and adults.

Insecure attachment is found in approximately 40% of toddlers in the UK and USA.

### **What are the advantages of a secure attachment?**

Attachment is an inborn system of the brain that evolved to keep the child safe. It enables the child to:

- Seek proximity to the parent;
- Go to the parent at times of distress for comforting as a source of a safe haven;
- Internalize the relationship with the parent as an internal model of a secure base. This sense of security is built upon repeated experiences of being contingently connected with the attachment figure.

The impact of these experiences is to provide children with an internal sense of well-being that enables them to go out into the world to explore and make new connections with others.

**What can we, as society, do about it to help babies, toddlers and young children acquire a secure attachment?**

In the first place it is important to know as society, that a secure attachment is important for a young child, and for the adult that it will become. As society we can take steps to enable parents and care-givers to have sufficient time with their child and to ensure that the contact between the parent / care giver and the child is of sufficient quality. We can explain to parents what is secure attachment and how children can acquire it. If a parent is not securely attached himself or herself, then we can in many cases help the parent to overcome this. It has been shown that also the child will then often acquire secure attachment, even if it is already older than one.

Conclusion: there should be a pedagogical infrastructure in each EU member state, that is, made responsible for the quality of attachment of young children in its geographical area in the same way as medical authorities are now responsible for the health in their area.

**Working Group on the Quality of Childhood**

Personally I have been involved for some time in the activities in this area and I am deeply concerned about the quality of childhood in the member states of the European Union. For this reason I have taken the initiative to set up the Working Group on the Quality of Childhood within the European Parliament. Together with the Alliance for Childhood European Network Group we hold a number of sessions, the seventh of which will take place on 8 January 2008.

**Objectives of these meetings:**

- To gain a better understanding of the Quality of Childhood in the EU member states; this time we will focus on the theme 'attachment'.
- To think about the role that the European Parliament could play to improve the situation
- To get to grips with the principles and approaches that could lead to a betterment for children
- To form an effective working group and to get a sense of how to move on.

I take pleasure in inviting you for the seventh session on 8 January 2008. I believe that we as members of the European Parliament working together with likeminded NGOs and committed individuals can and should play an important role in this area.

Yours sincerely,

Karin Resetarits  
Member of the European Parliament

**Program Outline for Tuesday 8 January 2007**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Speaker / facilitator</b>
13.00	Opening	Karin Resetarits, Member of the European Parliament and Chairman of the Working Group
13.05	View from the Alliance for Childhood	Christopher Clouder, board member of the Alliance for Childhood European Network Group
13.15	Attachment, what it is, why it is important and what we, as society, can do about it to help young children acquire a secure attachment	Sir Richard Bowlby from the UK
14.45-15.00	Discussion	Karin Resetarits