

## **The Key to Successful Daycare**

**ABSTRACT** - Position paper by Richard Bowlby 2011.

**Throughout human evolution** hard working mothers have been helped to raise their young children, but until the 1970s the people helping would have been family members, neighbours or nannies and the children would have grown to love them as secondary attachment figures.

**Nowadays, the key to successful daycare** is for babies and toddlers to develop a secure secondary attachment to a practitioner, their “key-person”, before being left with them. Becoming attached takes most babies and toddlers a few weeks of frequent and regular visits to the practitioner in the daycare setting whilst being accompanied by mother.

**From about 3 months to 3 years** babies and toddlers are afraid when left with “strangers” - unfamiliar people such as new practitioners, agency staff, or students - and they become increasingly frightened the longer they are separated from an attachment figure.

**When first left in the care of “strangers”**, most babies and toddlers will start to protest and cry, but some quickly shut-down emotionally and don’t cry – these are often mistakenly seen as being the easy ones. The fear of separation eventually becomes so overwhelming that psychological defences are activated and babies and toddlers become disconnected from their feelings.

**Most babies and toddlers dissociate under the stress** of separation and can stay more or less withdrawn until they are reunited with an attachment figure. Periods of frequent and prolonged dissociation during infancy can develop into a psychological disorder where the person dissociates in every-day stressful situations such as in school, at work, and in relationships.

**Babies and toddlers** who are insecurely attached to their parents but develop a secure secondary attachment to an affectionate practitioner can have their insecurity partially compensated for. But when insecurely attached babies are cared for by a succession of “strangers” in daycare, they will suffer an additional risk factor.

**That young children always need access to a primary or secondary attachment figure** is a biological imperative that is not universally understood and which does not always sit comfortably with our political, financial or social aspirations. I fear the stress of daycare with strangers has become a contributing factor to the educational, behavioural and mental health problems of many of today’s troubled children.