

# Peculiarities of the Child's Attachment to the Mother, Child-parent Relation Style and the Child's Adaptation to the Kindergarten

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The article represents a research on correlation between the quality of the child's attachment to the mother, the type of interaction in a dyad and the course of adaptation to the kindergarten among 1–3-year-old children. The research involved 52 mother-child pairs. The following research techniques were applied: adaptation list analysis; interviews with kindergarten teachers intended to reveal peculiarities in the child's period of adaptation as well as in mother-attachment manifestation; observation of children's behavior in the group (including behavior at meeting and separating from the mother, and during a free game activity, communications with adults and peers); parent questioning to reveal peculiarities of adaptation and the type of attachment to the mother, as well as questionnaires to study child-parent interaction ("Parent-Child Interactions" I. M. Markovskaya and "Questionnaire on Child-Parent Affective Interaction" E. I. Zakharova).

The research findings have proved that favorable adaptation behavior is demonstrated by children with secure attachment and upon a high level of mother's affective interaction with a child. Unfavorable adaptation is noted with children with insecure attachment and deficiency in mother's positive affective interaction with and attitude to the child.

**Keywords:** the child's adaptation to the kindergarten, attachment to the mother, interaction style, mother's affective attitude to the child.

The issue of a child's adaptation to kindergarten conditions arose at the very first days of kindergarten existence and it has remained urgent so far. When N. M. Ak-sarina singled out difficulties in the child's adaptation to the kindergarten as an indi-

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vidual problem, she gave an example of a transplanted tree, which required special gardener's care and treatment. Separating from the mother, destruction of established life stereotypes, new surroundings, unknown people, lack of points of contact to habitual life – all these are factors that provoke stress and often result in a child's social and psychological disadaptation.

It should be noted that to solve the above issue, the 1–3-year-olds pedagogics has developed a set of actions to promote children's adaptation to kindergarten conditions. These are recommendations for an individual approach based on thoroughly developed parent inquiry forms and questionnaires, visits to future kindergarteners' families, etc. Nevertheless, attempts to determine points of contact between a family and a kindergarten, to develop joint approaches to a child have turned out to be ineffective. Children came to the group with their favorite toy, heard their "domestic" pet name, kept by hand the kindergarten teachers they liked most, but they still suffered from separation from their family, disturbance in habitual way of living [8].

Practical developments by psychologists (N. M. Aksarina, K. L. Pechera, L. G. Golubeva, N. P. Zhukova, R. V. Tonkova-Yampolskaya) have significantly promoted solution of the problem. Research of character and duration of period of adaptation enabled to determine a number of factors that influence the course of adaptation: age, state of health, mental development level, individual peculiarities of psychological orientation, temperament, previous social adaptation experience [3; 7; 9]. The works by L. N. Galiguzova revealed correlation between a child's adaptation to the kindergarten and development of his need for communication. Thus, the reason for a child's difficult habituation to the day nursery may be discrepancy between too prolonged affective form of communication and formation of new activities with objects, which require cooperation with adults. Another factor to influence adaptation is formation of need for communication with persons of the same age [6].

Proceeding the line of search for psychological adaptation mechanisms, we have

identified two more factors important from our viewpoint, which condition a child's adaptation to the kindergarten: quality of the child's attachment to the mother and the child-parent relation style.

It is now generally acknowledged that it is important to establish the child's attachment to close relatives (primarily to the mother) starting from the first months of life. Such affective attachment is absolutely necessary for full-fledged mental development of a child. It provides a child with a feeling of safety, promotes personality development and successful socialization [2; 4].

The child's behavior reveals signs of attachment in the following way. The person a child got attached to (the attachment figure) can soothe and console the infant better than others; the child appeals to him (her) for consolation more often than to others, the child feels fear less frequently in his (her) presence. Attachment to certain persons (to the mother) becomes apparent with infants older than 6 month. The child's feeling of attachment to the mother is at its highest point between 12 and 18 months of age and decreases by the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of life [4]. This attitude is not inherent, it depends on adult relatives' sensitivity to the child's needs, on the character of their interaction and communication with the child.

Researchers by M. Ainsworth, J. Bowlby and others identified three types of a child's attachment to an adult primary caregiver (to the mother):

- 1) secure, safe attachment (type B);
- 2) insecure avoidant attachment (type A);
- 3) insecure ambivalent (anxious-resistant) attachment (type C).

It has been shown that secure attachment is the most favorable for mental development, while insecure ambivalent (anxious-resistant) attachment is the most unfavorable [4].

In Russian psychology, under the communication genesis concept, M. I. Lisina studied formation of children's affective bonds to the mother (if we consider children in a family) and to a primary caregiver (in case of residential institutions) during the first year of life, as well as self-image and attachments of 1–3-year-olds [1; 2].

*Findings of attachment research obtained by foreign and Russian specialists enable the following assumption: since the child's attachment to the mother has influence on the child's socialization, it can also have certain impact on his adaptation to the kindergarten. Period of adaptation of children with different attachment types will proceed in different ways and will be noted for various degrees of gravity (difficult, moderately difficult, easy).*

The second determinant of adaptation to a new psychological environment may be child-parent relation established in the family. It is known that the type of parents-children interaction largely influences the child's mental development, his personality formation. This influence can become apparent at a critical juncture of experiencing psychological stress, which undoubtedly is period of adaptation to the kindergarten.

The empirical study was carried out in two stages.

The first stage focused on revealing the correlation between general course of period of adaptation (its duration and respectively its gravity) and the quality of attachment to mother and parents-child interaction type. The study was carried out in 2003 at Moscow kindergartens № 857 and № 2022<sup>1</sup>. The research involved 32 children at the age of one to three years, their mothers and teachers of the groups. The following main research tools were applied:

- Adaptation lists analysis;
- Interviews with teachers intended to reveal peculiarities of the child's period of adaptation, and mother-attachment manifestations;
- Observation of children's behavior in the group, including at reunification and separation from the mother;
- Parent interview to find out adaptation peculiarities and mother-attachment character;
- I.M. Markovkaya's questionnaire to study parents-children interaction.

Based on research findings, comparison was made of empirical data on adaptation, attachment and child-parent interaction style.

The first step of analysis compared data on the course of period of adaptation with children and the type of their attachment to the mother. Then the data on adaptation was correlated to child-parent interaction characteristics.

Comparison of adaptation and attachment type peculiarities has proved that the overwhelming majority of children with an easy course of period of adaptation (16 out of 22, i.e., 73%) had secure attachment to the mother. The majority of children with moderately difficult adaptation (6 out of 8, i.e., 75%) revealed insecure attachment: either that of avoidant type (2 children), or ambivalent (anxiously-resistant) type (4 children). Children with a difficult course of period of adaptation also demonstrated insecure attachment to the mother (2 children).

The following regularities were revealed when analyzing the research findings related to character of adaptation and child-parent interaction peculiarities.

1. Interactions between practically all parents and children, whose period of adaptation was characterized as easy (20 out of 22, i.e., 90%), were noted by:

- low or average level of requirements to the child;
- low or average extent of austerity;
- average or high control level;
- average level of child acceptance;
- average or high level of interaction consistency;
- average intensity of educational confrontation in the family.

2. Interaction between parents and children, whose period of adaptation passed in a moderately difficult or difficult form, was noted for the following in all cases (10 out of 10, i.e., 100%):

- average or high extent of austerity toward the child;
- considerable emotional distance in relationship;
- low level of the child acceptance;
- low or average degree of cooperation with the child.

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<sup>1</sup> Babulina N. V. Peculiarities of child-mother attachment, type of child-parent relationships and adaptation to a kindergarten. Master's thesis. MSUPE, 2003.

Besides, parents demonstrated average or high level of anxiety for the child.

Thus, the research findings have proved that in the majority of cases *easy form of adaptation* was typical of children with a secure type of attachment to the mother, *moderately difficult* and *difficult* adaptation was specific to children with insecure attachment. Besides, in all instances, child-parent interactions of children with moderately difficult and difficult forms of adaptation had unfavorable characteristics. The revealed tendencies enabled to set new questions forward:

1) how are different types of insecure attachment (avoidant and ambivalent (anxious-resistant) types) correlated to difficult and moderately difficult forms of adaptation?

2) what impact is made by the mother's emotional attitude on the course of child's period of adaptation?

Raised questions served the rationale for further research, which constituted the second stage of work.

The following **hypothesis** was set up for experimental investigation: *peculiarities of the mother-child affective interaction influence the child's adaptation to the kindergarten.*

Additional hypothesis: *the course of children's period of adaptation depends on the type of attachment to the mother connected with peculiarities of the mother's affective attitude to the child.*

In compliance with the hypothesis put forward, the experimental investigation was accomplished to reveal peculiarities of mother-child affective interaction, the child's attachment to the mother, the course of child's adaptation to the kindergarten. The following methods and techniques were applied:

- adaptation lists analysis;
- interviews with teachers;
- standardized observation of children;
- parent in interview;
- E. I. Zakharova's questionnaire on child-parent affective interaction [5].

Experimental investigation was carried out at Moscow kindergarten № 1817 in junior groups (1–3 years old children) in 2005. The research involved 20 pairs (mother-child), and 4 teachers.

In the course of work, peculiarities in passing the period of adaptation in junior groups of kindergarten were identified at first step of this stage. The data was used, which related to peculiarities of children's adaptation and was obtained via adaptation list analysis, interviews with teachers and parents' questioning. Analysis of results has proved that adaptation to kindergarten passed in *easy form* with 45% of children, in *moderately difficult form* – with 30% of children, in *difficult form* – with 25% of children.

During the second step, peculiarities of children's attachment to the mother were revealed. To determine the quality of attachment, the following methodic tools were applied:

- Parent and teacher questioning;
- Standardized observation intended to reveal peculiarities of: a) the child's reunification and separation from the mother; b) children's behavior in groups (games, communications with adults and peers); c) characteristics of falling asleep and sleeping.

The obtained results have shown that secure attachment (type B) to the mother is formed with 60% of children, insecure avoidant attachment (type A) – with 20% of children, insecure ambivalent (anxious-resistant) attachment (type C) – with 20% of children.

The third step investigated peculiarities of affective side of interaction in dyads with the help of the questionnaire on child-parent affective interaction (QCPAI).

The overall results received via the QCPAI are presented in the Table.

Average (M) and critical (N) characteristics of affective side of child-parent interactions (as regards to the mother-child dyad)

When analyzing the data represented in Table 1, characteristics are distinguished, manifestation of which has turned out to be higher or lower than those in the main group. The highest of all mothers assess their ability to perceive the child's state (4.1), their feelings in the situation of interaction with the child (4.2) and aspiration for body contact (4.3), which enables to positively assess mothers' emotional interaction with children as a whole. Along with that, a number of characteristics have low values, thus making the picture not so successful. Such

| Interaction Characteristics |  | M   | N   |
|-----------------------------|--|-----|-----|
| I                           | Ability to perceive the psychological state                                    | 4.1 | 3.6 |
| II                          | Understanding reasons of the psychological state                               | 3.3 | 2.6 |
| III                         | Empathy  | 2.7 | 2.3 |
| IV                          | Parents' feeling in situation of interaction                                   | 4.2 | 3.6 |
| V                           | Unconditional acceptance   | 3.9 | 3   |
| VI                          | Acceptance of him(her)self as a parent   | 3.8 | 3.1 |
| VII                         | Prevailing affective background  | 3.9 | 3.4 |
| VIII                        | Aspiration for body contact  | 4.3 | 3.7 |
| IX                          | Provision of emotional support   | 3.6 | 3.  |
| X                           | Orientation toward the child's psychological state when initiating interaction | 2.9 | 2.2 |
| XI                          | Ability to influence on the child's emotional state                            | 3.4 | 2.6 |

characteristics are first of all: empathy (2.7) and orientation toward the child's state when establishing interaction (2.9). Against a background of distinct ability to perceive the child's state, mothers do not strive for showing responsiveness and empathy, do not consider it necessary to take into account the child's emotional state during real interaction. More often, they are oriented to their own plans, mood or social imperatives.

The N value indicated in Table 1 is the extreme value an individual characteristic can acquire taking into account the mean square deviation, without going beyond the average value area. If in a specific dyad the characteristic acquires a value lower than that designated by N, we can speak about deficiency in respective characteristic of affective side of interaction. Analysis of obtained results has shown that deficiency in certain affective interaction characteristics is noted in 60% of cases, i. e., with 12 mothers. The quantity of characteristics with low values varies from 1 to 7 in specific dyads.

All the data obtained during the research was brought into correlation to each other. As a result, the following was determined:

- All children with a *easy* form of adaptation have formed secure attachment (type B) (9 out of 9–100%);

- Majority of children with adaptation in a *moderately* difficult form (4 out of 6–67%) had insecure mother-attachment: either avoidant (type A) (3 children – 50%) or ambivalent (anxious-resistant) (type C) (1 child – 17%);

- Secure attachment (type B) was noted with 2 children with adaptation in a moderately difficult form;

- The overwhelming majority of children with a difficult form of adaptation has formed insecure attachment (4 out of 5 – 80%): type A attachment (1 child – 20%), type C attachment (3 children – 60%).

Correlation of data on the course of children's period of adaptation and peculiarities of child-parent affective interaction has shown the following dependencies:

- 1) in case of child's *easy* adaptation to the kindergarten: the majority of mothers (7 out of 9) have practically all characteristics of affective interaction expressed to a sufficient extent, only 22% of probationers (2 out of 9) revealed deficiency in intensity of mother's positive affective attitude to the child;

- 2) in case of *moderately* difficult child's adaptation to the kindergarten: practically all dyads (except for one) revealed deficiency in characteristics of affective side of child-parent interaction (5 out of 6);

3) in case of child's difficult adaptation to the kindergarten, all mothers (5 out of 5) revealed deficiency characteristics of affective attitude to the child.

Most often deficiency in the following affective interaction characteristics was noted in case of *unfavorable course of adaptation*:

a) mother's ability for empathy to the child;  
б) unconditional acceptance; aspiration for body contact;

б) taking into account the child's state when initiating interaction.

Upon mother-child *harmonious affective interaction*, the following is expressed most vividly:

- Positive feelings arising with mother when communicating with the child;
- Unconditional acceptance;
- Prevalence of positive background in affective interaction;
- Aspiration for body contact.

In case of deficiency in intensity of characteristics of *child-parent interaction affective side* we can speak about disharmonious mother-child emotional interaction.

Thus, the conclusion can be made that the proposed hypothesis regarding a correlation between peculiarities of mother-child affective interaction and the course of child's adaptation to the kindergarten has proved true. At the tendency level, existence of the period-of-adaptation course dependence on the mother-attachment type has also been confirmed:

• In the majority of cases, *easy form of adaptation* is inherent to children with secure attachment (type B);

• *Moderately difficult adaptation* – is typical of children with insecure attachment (type A or type C);

• *Difficult adaptation* – also correlates with insecure attachment of predominantly ambivalent (anxious-resistant) type (C).

Similar data was obtained at the first stage of research.

Practically in all cases, emotional component on child-parent relations is of disharmonious nature if children demonstrate moderately heavy and heavy forms of adaptation to the kindergarten. Particularly alarming is the fact

that 60% of dyads demonstrate a certain extent of deficiency in the most important characteristics of mother's affective attitude to the child (empathy, acceptance, responsiveness, etc.).

It is necessary to emphasize that parent-child affective interaction, which occurs at the very beginning of the child's life, has enormous impact on all of his subsequent development. In the course of repeated interactions with the mother and other close relatives, the so-called "working models" of self, of others and of interpersonal interaction are formed with the child. All these models later help to orientate himself in new situations, to interpret them and to react accordingly. Attentive, sensitive, careful parents form the child's sense of basic confidence in the world; establish a positive model of self, of others and of safe social interaction. Disharmonious relations, on the contrary, convince the child that other people, as well as the parents, are not reliable, predictable, trustworthy partners (negative working model of others). Thus, the model of self, of others and of interpersonal interactions being formed during the first year of life largely determines the child's perception of the world in future, establishment of relations with peers and adults, development of his cognitive capabilities, ability to adapt to new conditions of living [2; 4].

Entering the kindergarten is a stressful situation for a child, which exposes the child's organism and mentality to a serious trial. In this connection, a compulsory assessment of psychological mechanisms of the child's adaptation to the kindergarten seems important as it could make this period in the child's and parents' lives less painful.

Undoubtedly, the problem of correlation between emotional component in child-parent interaction and the course of child's adaptation to the kindergarten is rather versatile and complicated. Nevertheless, it can be affirmed that insecure mother-attachment and disharmonious character of mother-child interaction represent considerable risk factors to children's further socio-emotional development and can specifically serve a reference point for forecasting the course and outcome of period of adaptation.

The data obtained in this research can be used by practicing psychologists working at kindergartens. When a child is entering a kindergarten, it seems necessary to assess quality of attachment and character of affective interaction, and mother's attitude to the child. During the period of adaptation and as a family psychological support, parents can

be provided with recommendations in advisory form, intended to develop and, if necessary, to correct affective interaction with the child.

This will help to ensure the most favorable conditions for the child's adaptation to the kindergarten, and will enable smooth transition from domestic to public education.

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