

Attachment, Danger and Role of the Father in Family Life Span

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Abstract

Human beings show an innate predisposition to develop attachment relations with primary parental figures that perform a protection function against danger. In couple and family life, this necessity is particularly evident in the perinatal period, during the adolescence and the emancipation of the offspring and in every stressful and potentially dangerous period. In these situations the family attachment system will be activated and a fundamental aspect of parenting will be to offer a *secure base* to the offspring, i.e. an atmosphere of safety and trust in the relationship with the attachment figure.

Another parental function very important for protection from traumatic experiences is to foster mentalization. This function, a consequence of the quality of attachment, is fundamental for the development and the organization of the Self and enables regulation and control of affects and their somatic correlates, mainly in stressful circumstances.

Empirical research has evidenced how in the perinatal period the mother's and father's emotional states are significantly linked. Moreover, in this period, fathers themselves may also suffer from affective disorders similar to post-partum depression. An important male function, in the perinatal period, seems to be provision of a secure base for his companion, helping her to overcome the difficulties, keeping suffering at endurance levels and fostering the conditions by which the special relation between the mother and the baby can develop in an adequate way. In fact, preoccupied, too anxious or depressed fathers, or those with behavioural problems (pathological aggressiveness, alcoholism, addiction disorders), can be a handicap for the emotional equilibrium of their companion and for the good development of the relationship between mother and child. Some research data confirming this hypothesis are described.

Keywords

Attachment, secure base, danger, post partum depression, couple, parenthood, father, mother