

# ATTACHMENT: PURPOSE AND HOW IT HELPS THE CHILD

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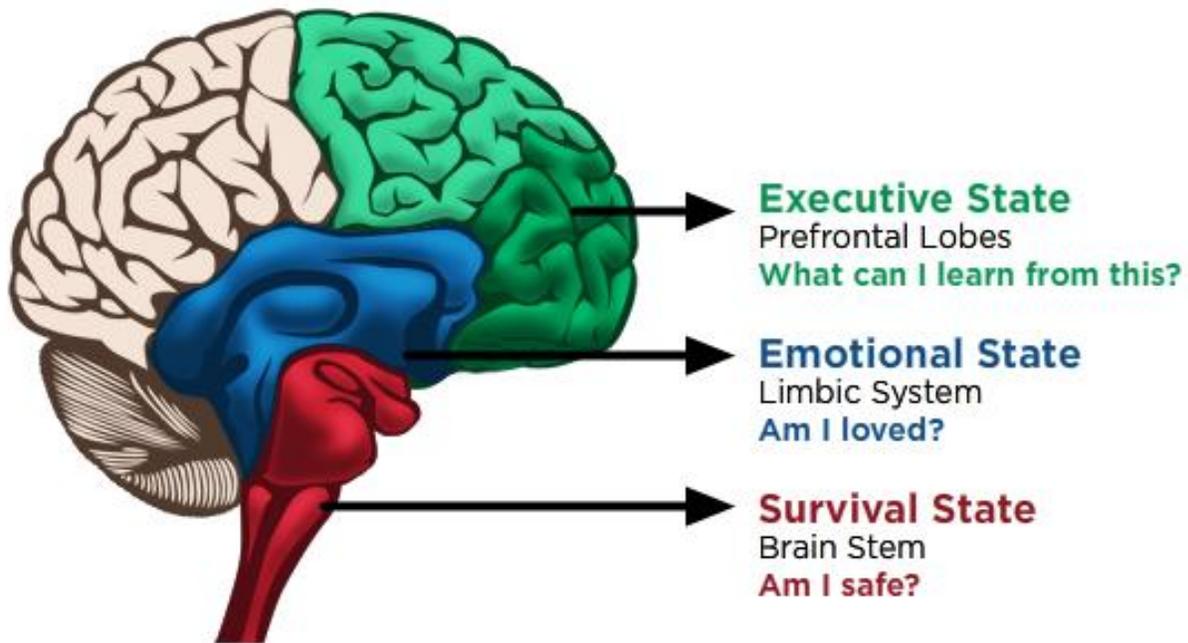
In the animal kingdom, the primary purpose of attachment is to provide safety and protection for the vulnerable. The young animal that seeks proximity to its caregiver is more likely to survive. It helps ensure the survival of the species.

## **Attachment in humans has many secondary purposes:**

- the stimulation of the child’s intellectual potential
- the development of the child’s socialization skills
- the facilitation of Identity Formation
- to enable the child to modulate stress and arousal levels, to increase pleasurable states/feelings and to decrease stressful/painful states/feelings
- the development of the conscience, allowing the child to learn the critical skill of having empathy for others
- the ability to attend and focus
- the ability to delay the gratification of their needs being met (manage their impulses)

## **Attachment helps the child:**

- attain full intellectual potential
- feel deeply valued, loved and connected
- think logically; good decision making
- develop social emotions (reciprocity)
- trust others (emotional intimacy)
- trust self; become self-reliant
- cope with stress/frustration (emotional resilience)
- reduce feelings of despair/loneliness/jealousy
- overcome common fears/worries/anxieties
- increase feelings of self-worth, self-esteem



Attachment patterns develop on a continuum, with the optimum pattern being a *Secure Attachment Pattern*. The infant enters the world in a 'disorganized state' and will respond to the attachment pattern of the adult caregivers. If the caregiver is attentive, responsive and attuned to the emotional and developmental needs of the infant, a secure pattern will likely develop.

The infant enters the world with an 'attachment behavioral system' (Bowlby) that needs to be responded to or activated in order for the infant/child to learn, grow and develop healthy interpersonal and affect modulation skills. The infant brain is malleable (vulnerable) to adverse (toxic) experiences. The infant brain is experience dependent (on Attachment); its structural organization reflects the history of the organism.

In Dan Siegel's *The Developing Mind*, he explains that infants/children carry those to whom they are attached inside of their mind, in the form of multi sensory images – face, voice, smell, taste and touch. This mental representation of the 'primary attachment relationship' is internalized, giving the child the sense that they can access their *attachment figure* when needed (especially when experiencing distress/pain/fear).

These limbic bonds are created through thousands upon thousands of sensory rich experiences between attachment figure and infant/child and become embedded/encoded within the Limbic Structure of the infant/child's brain. The child creates an *Internal Working Model* based on these early attachment experiences:

I am \_\_\_\_\_

Caregivers are \_\_\_\_\_

The World is \_\_\_\_\_