

# The Attachment Theory - How does Love work?

Frankfurt am Main, Germany, November 12, 2016



Claus Dubisz



Hilde Piepenburg



By Monika Kunde

The family is still highly topical, even if some people have declared it to be an 'outdated model'. This is clear from the results of the „Shell Youth Study 2015“, which conducted research into the value system of German youth. Young people give priority to values such as friendship, partnership and family. 89% put particular importance on having good friends, 85% a partner whom they can trust, and 72% a good family life.

So we were extremely happy that almost half of those participating in the UPF event were younger than 25 years old.

Following a short introduction into the basic goals of UPF by Claus Dubisz, an entertaining short video „Fred, der Exbärte: Über die Eltern-Kind-Bindung“, (from a series of online presentation for young parents) set the atmosphere for the main presentation - 'the theory of attachment - how does love actually work?'

The speaker, Hildegard Piepenburg, is the mother of four children as well as holding a B.Sc. in psychology, and was thus able to draw upon a wealth of personal experience as well as theoretical knowledge to give a wide range of information which she presented under three headings - 1) research into bonding, 2) research into the brain and emotions and 3) what is love?

1) The attachment theory is an influential psychological theory which was established in the 1950's by John Bowlby, an English child psychiatrist. Attachment is an emotional tie, coming from the child as an expression of a basic, inborn need for closeness and security. The child, who is not capable of independent life, relies on being cared for and looks for protection and security from someone who is 'older and wiser'. In doing so,

it is not a matter of the provision of food or other things, but it is about the need for love.

A further need that children have is to investigate the environment, also known as the need to explore. Attachment and exploration oppose each other. The child must learn how to regulate closeness and distance. The unknown can only awaken curiosity when the child feels emotionally secure. Effective bonding promotes the child's independence and personality development. Or to express it another way, emotional security encourages learning.

Complimenting the two systems of behavior in the infant, is the so-called care system of the primary attachment figure, usually the mother. When she is sensitive to the child and promptly and reliably fulfills his needs, the child develops a secure attachment. When this is not the case, an insecure attachment develops which may be either avoiding or ambivalent. Such patterns of attachment will also affect the quality of the relationship in a later partnership. Family attachments have a lifelong importance for our emotional security.

2) The brain and research into emotions

Researchers call the brain a biosocial organ, since it is intrinsically shaped by the environment and the attachment figure. The child's first 2-3 years are especially formative for brain development.

A good environment in a harmonious family with a variety of stimuli, fosters a child's brain development. A bad environment such as, for example an irresponsibly run orphanage where there is a lack of love, has an inhibitory effect. This was very clearly demonstrated by the results of the „Bucharest Early Intervention Project“ a study of Romanian orphans, carried out by Charles A. Nelson.

The significance of emotions for human development was long underestimated, and this topic was not recognized as a field worthy of scientific research until the 1990s. The big surprise was that feelings are not accidental, erratic and meaningless, but rather logical, 'intelligent' and thoroughly efficient. Emotions motivate us to action - without emotions we would not be able to act. We learn emotional intelligence and develop our capacity for empathy in a stable, secure relationship.

3) What is love?

The understandings of the research into attachment, brain and emotions have led to the development of something like a formula for love. Sue Johnson, psychologist and partner therapist, introduces many practical applications of these results in her book: „Love Sense“, which she uses very successfully as emotion focused therapy (EFT) for couples. Johnson speaks about cracking the „love code“. Love is an internal composure, an attitude towards oneself and others with the goal of well-being. The need for bonding, the ability to care and to empathize, all belong to our basic equipment to practice love.

Mrs. Piepenburg ended her presentation by stating that the teachings of all religions exhort us to develop our heart and to do good: 'by heart, is meant the irrepressible impulse to experience joy through love. This heart is the deepest core of our being, implanted in us by God. In this way, we resemble him and strive to experience joy through love. When we can develop loving relationships on all levels; in the family, to all people, to nature and to God, the peaceful world which we all long for, will come about naturally.'

Everyone could agree with this statement, and the event ended with stimulating and lively discussion over coffee and cake.