

The Influence of Attachment Security on Children's Coping Strategies:

Preschool Children under Everyday Stress

By

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Advisor: Julia C. Torquati

This research examined the attachment security of preschool children as a predictor of their styles of coping with everyday stress. Participants were recruited from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and a local preschool. Attachment was assessed using the Attachment Doll Interview (Bretherton, Ridgeway, and Cassidy, 1990; Oppenheim, 1997). Coping was assessed using the Children's Coping Strategies measure developed for this research. The Parent Perception Inventory (Hazzard, Christensen & Margolin, 1983; Torquati & Gamble, 2001) was used to measure parental warmth as a predictor for attachment and coping. Inverse correlations were found between secure attachment and the children's descriptions of negative parental responsiveness in a story completion task, problem solving and avoidance coping strategies, and between warm and harsh parenting. As positive parenting increased, children described less negative parental responsiveness in their attachment stories. Children who were more secure were less likely to use avoidance coping strategies. Stepwise regression analyses predicted problem-solving coping from positive parenting. Limitations, implications and future research topics are discussed.

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This study examined the parent-child attachment of preschool children to see how it influences children's coping with everyday stress. Participants came from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Child Development Lab and a local preschool. As secure attachment increased, children used fewer descriptions of negative parental responsiveness in a story completion task. Children with a secure attachment were less likely to use avoidant coping strategies. Children who used problem solving coping strategies were less likely to use avoidant coping strategies. Research found that warm parenting predicted children's use of problem solving coping. Limitations, implications and future research topics are discussed.