

# Developing a Lesson Plan: Sample Lesson Plan

A workshop from the University of Pittsburgh's  
University Center for Teaching & Learning



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Developmental Psychology  
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**Topic:** The Early Parent-Child Attachment Relationship

**Class Objectives:**

- Understand Bowlby's theory of attachment
- Learn how attachment security is measured in young children
- Examine factors that may promote children's attachment security
- Explore the long-term effects of early attachment security

**Relation to Course Goals:**

As an introductory lecture course, the goals relate to gaining a basic understanding of developmental psychology. Specific goals are to understand major age related developments and abilities, leading theories and explanations of developmental change, how research is conducted with children and adolescents, and contextual factors in development. Therefore, these lesson goals are highly related to the course goals. The lesson will cover the predominant theory of attachment as well as research conducted to test that theory. Furthermore, factors that promote the development of a secure caregiver-child attachment during early childhood are covered. In addition, milestones in attachment development are presented. Students are encouraged to participate and take an active role in learning. Students are asked discussion questions stemming from the presentation of videos depicting parent-child interactions in a lab measure of attachment. Throughout the class, new information on attachment is put into the context of prior knowledge of child development themes (e.g., nature vs. nurture).

**Prerequisite Knowledge:**

Students are expected to have attended previous classes when child development themes, temperament, and research methods were discussed. They are also expected to have read the chapter in the textbook on which this presentation is based.

**Key Concepts:**

Infancy, toddlerhood, early childhood, ethological theory, imprinting, evolution, genetics, individual differences, naturalistic observation, intervention, temperament, correlation vs. causation, nature vs. nurture

## **Instructional Strategies:**

### **6-6:05 PM: Introduce topic and specific goals of class**

- Ask whether students have questions about topics covered in previous classes

### **6:05-6:15 PM: Define attachment & present historical context of the beginning of attachment research**

- Observations of the behavior of children without permanent families (e.g., children in orphanages or foster homes)

### **6:15-6:30 PM: Discuss animal studies of attachment & show videos**

- Harry Harlow studies of early social deprivation of rhesus monkeys
- Ask for class response
  - How did monkey respond to being scared? What does this imply?
  - Why would Harlow scare the monkeys to study attachment?

### **6:30-6:40 PM: Present John Bowlby's attachment theory**

- Human infants are biologically predisposed to develop attachment to parent to increase the likelihood of survival
- Attachment quality is reflected in the extent to which the presence of the parent allows the child to feel comfortable enough to explore the environment
- Early parent-child attachment quality has long-term effects on child development and behavior

### **6:40-7:10 PM: Describe Mary Ainsworth's research & measurement of parent-child attachment security in a lab**

- Ainsworth tested Bowlby's theory and developed a method of measuring attachment, the "Strange Situation" paradigm
- Using this paradigm, Ainsworth discovered three types of early parent-child attachment quality:
  - Secure
  - Insecure-avoidant
  - Insecure-resistant
- A fourth attachment category was later discovered: insecure-disorganized/disoriented
- Show first Strange Situation video (secure attachment)
  - Discuss student observations of parent and child behavior in video
  - What did you observe in the video? Which attachment category does this case fall into? Why? Any other ideas?
- Show second Strange Situation video (insecure-avoidant attachment)
  - Compare and contrast parent and child behaviors in the two videos
  - What did you observe in the video? What was different about this video compared to the first video? How would you rate attachment quality in this video? Why?

### **7:10-7:20 PM: Present parenting and child factors related to early attachment quality**

- Parental sensitive responsive caregiving
- Child temperament

### **7:20-7:30 PM: Discuss research findings on the potential effect of early attachment quality on later development**

- Effect of early attachment quality on academic and social functioning
- Potential underlying mechanisms

- Enduring internal working model of relationship quality (based on Bowlby's attachment theory)
- Indirect association via effect on later/concurrent parent-child relationship quality
- Ask for student thoughts
  - Which mechanism do you think is more likely and why? Is there any support/validity for the idea that early attachment quality would have long-term effects?

### **Reflective Statement**

**How well did you capture and maintain the attention of the students? How do you know?**

I was able to maintain the attention of students. Students responded to questions and asked pertinent questions at times. I did not observe any off-task behavior. Showing videos and asking for student responses to the videos helped to keep the students focused on the material.

**How was your content organized? Would you make any changes?**

The lesson content was organized in the same manner as the content in the book. Attachment theory was presented first and then research conducted to test that theory which seems to be a logical order. I would not change the sequence in which material was presented.

**How did you build in relevancy and meaning into the lesson? What did you do to motivate students and maintain interest? Did it work? Describe any revisions.**

I showed how early attachment quality could be used to predict later development, which reflects a practical application of measuring early attachment quality. I used videos to motivate students and maintain interest. The students appeared to be captivated by the videos and had many relevant and useful responses. If I were doing this lesson a second time, I could incorporate even more class discussion, for instance, asking them about the meaning of attachment in the beginning of the class. I would also break the class up into small groups to discuss issues related to attachment development, and I would move around the room checking in with each group.

**Are there areas of the lesson where students had more difficulty? If so, why do you think this occurred? What could you do to remedy it?**

Students may have had difficulty with conceptualizing the definition of attachment, which is difficult even for researchers in this field. They did not indicate having difficulty in this area but attachment is a difficult concept to understand. To address this issue, I would elicit student perceptions of the meaning of attachment in the beginning of the class if I were giving this lecture again.

**In what ways did you check students' understanding? Would you make any changes?**

I checked student understanding by asking if there were any questions. If I was giving the lecture again, I would periodically present multiple choice questions to check their understanding of the concepts.

**How did your lesson flow given the time constraints of class? Would you modify this and if so, in what ways?**

The lesson fit well within the time constraints of the class and flowed well. This was a strength of the lecture and I would not change it.

**Are there other organizational changes that you would make that have not been addressed?**

I would have wanted to incorporate more student discussion and participation. I would have wanted to emphasize how the study of attachment is related to developmental psychology themes. Furthermore, I would elicit discussion regarding how attachment development relates to development of other skills, such as emotion regulation, motor skills, physical growth, language, and social interaction.